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## PART FOUR

## - The Future of India

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II. POSSIBILITIES OF A SETTLEMENT . . . . .	25
III. BRITAIN AND INDIA: THE LAST CHAPTER . . . . .	28

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*At the End*

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physical map of Europe, with its deeply indented coast, its peninsulas and inland seas and islands, and its mountain ranges, might seem to have been drawn so as to foster separatism and hinder unity, and from the Dark Ages to the present day Europe has been torn by constant war between its component states. Nevertheless while it has never recovered that large measure of political unity which the Romans gave it, it has retained through all its vicissitudes an underlying unity of culture woven out of Christianity and Hellenism. Though it has been deliberately repudiated by the barbarous cult of Prussianism and for a time, which now seems to be passing, by the isolationist doctrine of Soviet Russia, European civilisation is more than a phrase. Most European peoples are aware that they are Europeans and that they share certain common standards of belief and behaviour. Every one knows that on the strengthening of that consciousness and on its increasing embodiment in political and economic combination the hopes of all Europe depend.

Up to a point the history of India followed much the same course. The service rendered to a great part of Europe by the Roman Empire was rendered to a great part of India by the Maurya Empire (about 320-184 B.C.) linked with the names of Chandragupta and Asoka, and by the Gupta Empire (about A.D. 320-500), the golden age of Hindu culture. The map, it might seem, should have made the maintenance of political unity easier in India than in Europe. The Indian coastline is singularly unbroken. There are only two large islands off it. There is only one large peninsula. No great natural frontier crosses the mainland. The one formidable barrier, the Vindhya Mountains and the adjacent belt of rocky ground and desert, is much easier to penetrate than the major barriers in Europe, and, though there are inevitable differences of climate and vegetation in a land which stretches from 8 to 35 degrees north of the Equator, the whole of it is exposed to a scorching summer sun and depends for its very life on its river waters and seasonal rains. Thus the physical character of India seems to make for unity as much as that of Europe makes for separatism. But India is a vast country, as big as Europe without Russia, and, till the advent of modern science, mere distance was almost as estranging as alps and inland seas. Hence the Mauryas and the Guptas failed to master all India as the Romans failed to master all Europe, and between and after those periods of relative unity and peace India was riven at least as much as Europe by the growth of separate and conflicting

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there are two other elements in it besides caste which, because of their political implications, cannot be ignored in a study of India's political development. The first is the inferior status which Hinduism accords to women. Its most obvious feature to day is the seclusion of women from contact with men outside the family. Its most startling feature in the past—startling to Western minds at least—was the religious rite of *suttee* in observance of which the Hindu widow, often by an act of heroic devotion, but often under duress immolated herself on her husband's funeral pyre.<sup>1</sup> Another manifestation of it was the practice of female infanticide.<sup>2</sup>

The second feature of Hinduism which clashes with Western thought is its treatment of the lowest castes, loosely called 'outcastes', who are believed to be mostly descended from the aboriginal races of India and now number about 50 millions or roughly one-eighth of the total Indian population. Their official name has recently been changed to 'Scheduled Castes', but they used to be called, more informatively, 'Depressed Classes' and were popularly known as 'untouchables'. They rank far below and almost outside the caste-system, and they constitute a proletariat in the harshest sense of the word. An orthodox caste-Hindu must bathe at once if he has been touched by one of them. In some parts of India the outcaste may not enter a Hindu temple, he may not draw water from the village well, his children may not attend the village school.

Hindu social reformers, it need hardly be said, have long been demanding a more liberal recognition of the rights of women and of outcastes as well as a relaxation of the caste-system as a whole. Great progress has certainly been made in the course of the last generation. A visitor from the West might move in cultivated Hindu circles, especially among younger folk, and be virtually unaware of caste. He would find his hosts talking the same sort of democratic language that he talks himself at home. But the intelligentsia constitute less than one-tenth of the people, and the vast majority of Hindus are uneducated peasant-folk, living in their countless little villages a life which still follows the ancient rules and has not as yet been deeply affected by the ideas of the outer world. It will take time for this static and conservative society to become democratic in the sense or to the extent that the West is democratic.

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China, through Northern India, and, striking out south-east by sea, it overran Malaya and the East Indian archipelago. In all that vast area Islam is still a living and compelling faith.

Easy of approach along the coast of the Arabian Sea, Sind was the first part of India to be submerged by this eastward-flowing tide. It was conquered by the Arabs early in the eighth century, and the great majority of its people have remained Moslems ever since. Between A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1500 a succession of Turkish and Afghan soldiers of fortune—Mahmud of Ghazni was the first—broke through the mountains in the north-west and drove right across the great northern plain to the delta of the Ganges. They also crossed the Vindhya and in the course of several wars four Moslem States were carved out from the old Hindu kingdoms of the Deccan. The armies of these invaders were never very large, and their success was only partly due to superiority in equipment and the art of war. The main reason why the Moslems so easily obtained their hold in India was the failure of the Hindu kingdoms to combine against them. In the Middle Ages, at any rate, Christian Europe did better in this respect. French troops crossed the Pyrenees to help the Spaniards. The Crusades, despite their undercurrents of intrigue and greed, were a genuine manifestation of the unity of Western Christendom.

The area in which Moslem rule was strongest continued to be the area most open to invasion—the Indus basin and the Ganges plain. Delhi was early chosen for its capital, and there for five centuries a series of Turkish and Afghan monarchs reigned, till, in 1525, the greatest, though not the last, of the Moslem invaders rode through the passes from Kabul. Babur, half Turk, half Mongol, directly descended from the great conqueror Timur (Tamurlane), descended into north-west India with only some 10,000 fighting men; but he had been invited into the Punjab by its Moslem governor in rebellion against Delhi; and the Rajputs, a loose confederacy of Hindu warrior chieftains who had maintained their independence in the fastnesses of the rocky country now known as Rajputana, had promised him their support. The issue was decided in two battles. The rout of the Delhi army at Panipat in 1526 gave Babur the mastery of the northern plain. At Khanua in 1527 the Rajputs, who had turned against him, were no less crushingly defeated. No other formidable enemies stood in Babur's path. The Hindu South was still incapable of forming a common front against the danger in the North. There was little, therefore, to prevent the firm establishment at Delhi of the dynasty of Moslem monarchs who

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Moslems The Rajputs, for example, as notorious for their internal feuds as for their courage in battle, fought one another in the service of rival Moslem overlords

Nevertheless, if the unity of India under the Moguls was far from perfect, there was more of it than there had ever been since the distant days of the great Hindu empires And it was reflected in an efficient system of bureaucratic organisation. The Empire was divided into fifteen Provinces (including the Afghan Province) each under its Governor Each large city also had its more or less autocratic ruler Justice was certainly purer than in earlier times, but, except in matters of purely religious law, the executive authority shared in and at need controlled its administration For the mass of the people the most beneficent reform was the replacement of irregular and often arbitrary taxation by an elaborate land revenue system. Under Akbar the individual cultivator was required to pay one-third of the average annual value of his produce There is no record of agrarian disturbance in this period, and in the years of strife and misrule which followed the breakdown of the Empire the Indian peasantry looked back to the reign of Akbar as a golden age

It was also an age of cultural renaissance The plain of the Ganges was studded with Moslem mosques and tombs which rivalled in beauty the more ornamental Hindu temples of the South In other arts, whereas Hindu culture, like the Hindu faith, had always been rooted in India, the Moguls invited artists and poets and philosophers from other Moslem lands Exquisite painting was done in the Persian style, and Persian poetry became the vogue in court circles All in all, the Mogul age was the greatest age that India had known in modern history, and more than any other it made life tolerable for the Indian people But its boons were bought at a price For it was in the Mogul period that northern India was finally submerged in the tide of Moslem conquest which had ebbed and flowed for centuries past, and it was the greatness of the Mogul emperors that planted in the minds of Indian Moslems the conviction that, while they now belonged to India, India now belonged to them

### 3 THE MOSLEMS IN INDIA

Like Hinduism, Islam is more than a system of religious worship Like Hinduism, it is a rule of life laid down by a sacred law. But no two philosophies of thought and conduct could be more

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allowed to retain the rulership of their territories if they submitted to the paramountcy of the Emperor and gave him a quota of their revenues. This softening of the old relentless temper meant that Hinduism was not forcibly deleted from those parts of India which were swept by Moslem armies. It remained, and still remains, the faith of a substantial majority of Indians.<sup>1</sup> But the fact that conversions were not enforced did not mean that they were few and far between. The Indian Moslems would not number now nearly one-quarter of the total population if they were all descended from the relatively small numbers of invaders who came from beyond the border. In Bengal, in particular, there must have been conversion *en masse*, whether under compulsion or, as has been suggested, because most of the Bengalis of that day belonged to low and feebly Hinduised castes. And there were obvious inducements to individuals to change their faith and so at a stroke to take rank with the ruling rather than the subject class. In any case, whether forced or voluntary, large scale conversion meant not only that the Moslem community in India became more numerous than it would otherwise have been, but also that it was not a community of foreigners. Its differences in other respects with the Hindus have not been enhanced by a difference in race. Except in the neighbourhood of the north-west frontier, the vast majority of Indian Moslems are the progeny of folk who lived in India before Islam was born.

If the rigours of Moslem conquest were tempered in its later stages, they were brutal enough at first. Many pages of the records almost reek with slaughter. The ground is carpeted with corpses, and the rivers flow with blood. The punishment of captured enemies or rebels was often terrible—impalement, flaying alive, trampling by elephants, blinding. And as painful, perhaps, as the conquerors' cruelty and more persistent were the scorn and hate they showed for the religion of the conquered. The lives of Hindus might be spared, but not the symbols of their idolatry. A fury of iconoclasm descended on the Hindu shrines of northern India, and, except in the middle phase of the Mogul Empire, illumined by Akbar's wisdom, this deliberate desecration of Hindu holy places, thus wanton humiliation of Hindu pride, continued when massacre and torture had ceased. Mahmud of Ghazni, first Moslem invader of the North, sacked Somnath and smashed in pieces the famous image it contained. Aurangzeb, last of the great Moguls, built on the site of a demolished shrine at Benares a mosque whose minarets

<sup>1</sup> For statistics of the population at the census of 1941, see p. 301 below.

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allegiance, and the imperial army lost its best material, the Rajput soldier. Down in the South, the Marathas began the great revolt which was to do most in the end to bring the Mogul Empire down. For the whole of the second half of his fifty years' reign Aurangzeb was grappling with rebellion in the Deccan. When he died in 1707, the great imperial structure, which had held nearly all India within its framework for the best part of two centuries, was plainly about to collapse.

#### 4 EUROPE IN THE MOGUL AGE

In Europe, as in India, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of constant war, and after 1517, when, a few years before Babur invaded India, the Reformation may be said to have begun, the wars tended to become wars of religion. The devastating Thirty Years War (1618-48) was fought between Catholic and Protestant powers. And in several of its manifestations the schism of Western Christendom might seem comparable with the schism between Hinduism and Islam in India. Catholic and Protestant rulers alike treated their subjects of the other communion with the harshest severity. The tortures of the Spanish Inquisition were as cruel as anything which Hindus suffered at the hands of Moslems. Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603) coincided almost exactly with Akbar's (1556-1605): she was more tolerant than her predecessor, but men were still put to death for their opinions in her day. In France in that same period religious strife was more incessant and more bloody. The Massacre of St Bartholomew was perpetrated in 1572. But in the time of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), in most of western Europe, the age of toleration was dawning. There were exceptions, of course, and one of them is a blot on English history. Cromwell's bigotry in Ireland was as reckless as Aurangzeb's in India, and long after Aurangzeb was dead the penal laws subjected Catholics in Ireland—and to a less extent in England too—not only to restrictions on the practice of their religion but also to an inferior civic status not so very different from Aurangzeb's degradation of Hindus. If Hindus in the latter part of his reign could hold no high public office, Catholics in Britain and Ireland could hold no public office at all till 1829. Yet, when all is said, it is the contrast between the schism in Europe and the schism in India that strikes the historian, not the similarity. To make the two pictures correspond one must imagine that the Moslem invasion of Europe had not been checked at the Pyrenees and the

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Cervantes, Molière, and Pascal, of Copernicus and Galileo, to name only a few of the lights that illumined Europe. In England alone it was the age of Shakespeare and Milton, of Hobbes and Locke, of Harvey and Newton and Wren. And it was an age of no less remarkable development in more material things—in the management of money, for example, and the organisation of trade. Europe, in fact, was developing an immense dynamic force at a time when Indian society was static. That in itself made it probable that, if contact were established between Europe and India and it came to a trial of strength between them, Europe would prevail.

That contact was in fact established in this period was no accident: for one of the natural manifestations of the new age in Europe was the opening of the seas and the beginning of that momentous chapter of modern history—the outflow of the Europeans along the sea-ways of the world. And the first objective of the great explorers was, as it happened, to find a sailing route to the Indies. On that quest, thirty-three years before Babur invaded India, Columbus ran into America. On the same quest, five years later, da Gama rounded the Cape.

The Indians—and this is the last point of contrast—had never developed sea-power. The Arabs were great sailors. Before the coming of the Portuguese their fleets had commanded the Indian Ocean for centuries. But the Indians, though since the dawn of history their merchant ships had ventured over all the eastern seas between Mozambique and Canton and their traders had settled all along the coasts, had never tried, it seems, except perhaps in the Buddhist age, to obtain the naval strength which was to determine so much of the world's history. Thus the shores of India lay unprotected on the water from the intrusion of Europe. The Portuguese and their successors, the Dutch, the English and the French, had to fight one another, but not Indians, for the mastery of the Indian seas.

Cervantes, Molière, and Pascal, of Copernicus and Galileo, to name only a few of the lights that illumined Europe. In England alone it was the age of Shakespeare and Milton, of Hobbes and Locke, of Harvey and Newton and Wren. And it was an age of no less remarkable development in more material things—in the management of money, for example, and the organisation of trade. Europe, in fact, was developing an immense dynamic force at a time when Indian society was static. That in itself made it probable that, if contact were established between Europe and India and it came to a trial of strength between them, Europe would prevail.

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The Indians—and this is the last point of contrast—had never developed sea-power. The Arabs were great sailors. Before the coming of the Portuguese their fleets had commanded the Indian Ocean for centuries. But the Indians, though since the dawn of history their merchant ships had ventured over all the eastern seas between Mozambique and Canton and their traders had settled all along the coasts, had never tried, it seems, except perhaps in the Buddhist age, to obtain the naval strength which was to determine so much of the world's history. Thus the shores of India lay unprotected on the water from the intrusion of Europe. The Portuguese and their successors, the Dutch, the English and the French, had to fight one another, but not Indians, for the mastery of the Indian seas.

the notorious 'massacre' of English merchants at Amboyna in 1623.

The English, who had entered the field with the foundation of the East India Company in 1600, pursued from the outset a different policy. The business-men of London believed that great profits could be made from a reasonable share in Indian trade without attempting to establish a monopoly. The former would only require protection from attack at sea. The latter would involve the annexation and garrisoning of strategic posts and the heavy cost of constant fighting. All that was needed for business purposes, it was held, was for English merchants to obtain similar 'capitulations' from the Mogul Emperor to those they had been accustomed to obtain from the Ottoman Sultan of Turkey in the Levant, i.e. permission to make commercial settlements, known as 'factories', and to administer these townships under their own laws. The wise Sir Thomas Roe, who went with this object as James I's ambassador to Jehangir's court at Delhi in 1615, besought the Company to avoid the mistake of the Portuguese and the Dutch 'who seek plantation here by the sword'. 'Let this be received as a rule that, if you will profit, seek it at sea and in quiet trade; for without controversy it is an error to affect garrisons and land wars in India.'<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the following hundred years or so this rule was broken only once. Towards the end of the seventeenth century the control of the Company fell into the hands of Sir Josia Child, a masterful City magnate, who observed, prophetically but prematurely, that events were 'forming us into the condition of a sovereign State in India' and declared that the Company ought forthwith to lay 'the foundations of a large, well-grounded, sure English dominion in India for all time to come'.<sup>2</sup> With that object, in 1686, he made a dispute over customs duties in Bengal into an excuse for a declaration of war by the Company on the Mogul Empire, and dispatched ten ships and six hundred men to reduce Aurangzeb to submission. This airy essay in imperialism had the result it deserved. The English merchants were forced to evacuate their settlements in Bengal and so lost at a stroke the fruits of all their labours for the past fifty years. It was only the Company's command of the Indian Ocean and its interruption of the Moslem

<sup>1</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, ed. W. Foster (London, 1899), ii. p. 344.

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It was only the growth of the British Raj, it has been said, that prevented the Marathas from taking the place of the Moguls as the controlling and unifying power in all India, but it must be a matter of speculation whether in the long run they could have resisted the pressure of invasion by the old north-west route. One of the symptoms of Mogul collapse was the recurrence of that perennial danger. In 1738-9 Nadir Shah, ruler of Persia, invaded and annexed the Punjab and seized Delhi itself. For the whole of a day the city was given up to massacre and arson. In 1748, 1749, and 1752 Ahmad Shah Abdali, ruler of Afghanistan, invaded the Punjab. In 1754 he took and plundered Delhi, and in 1761 he met a great Maratha army on the historic battlefield of Panipat and routed it with such overwhelming slaughter—the death roll of combatants and camp-followers has been reckoned at nearly 200,000—that the power of the Marathas was completely broken for at least a generation.

Meanwhile India was drifting into chaos. The successors of Aurungzeb were still accorded the formalities of their imperial rank, but the scope of their real authority was confined to a steadily shrinking area round Delhi. Their Moslem viceroys became independent monarchs. Chief of these in the Deccan was the Nizam of Hyderabad, as he and his successors in the dynasty he

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## 2. BRITAIN VERSUS FRANCE IN INDIA

The origin of the British Raj is to be found in the fact that in the course of the eighteenth century India became involved in what corresponded in those days to a 'world war'. It was a century of persistent conflict between parliamentary Britain and absolutist and revolutionary France; and the battlefields were not only in the West, in Europe and North America and on the Atlantic, but also in the East, in Egypt and Syria, on the Indian Ocean and in India.

The French had come late into the field of Indian trade. Their East India Company was not founded till 1664: it never paid its way, and it was dissolved in 1769. But, though it failed to obtain as firm a hold on Indian soil as its British rival, it succeeded in establishing similar commercial settlements at Pondicherry and a few other points on the coast and in Bengal. If the French position was weaker than the British on land, it was strategically stronger on sea. Britain had not yet obtained a territorial foothold on the long sea-route from Europe nearer to India than St. Helena, but in Île de France (now Mauritius) the French possessed a first-rate naval base in the heart of the Indian Ocean. It could be used not only for preying on British merchant shipping but also for attacking the British settlements in India. Thus, at the outset of the war of 1744-8, La Bourdonnais, sailing from Port Louis and evading the ill-commanded British fleet, succeeded in capturing Madras.

Madras was restored at the peace of 1748, but meantime another able Frenchman was planning another kind of attack on the British position in India. Dupleix, Governor of Pondicherry from 1742 to 1754, had conceived, like Child before him, the idea of 'dominion' in India, and, owing to the collapse of the Mogul Empire, it was a more practicable idea in his day than in Child's. All that seemed necessary to begin with was to obtain ascendancy over the local despots of Southern India. With their aid the British could be expelled from the Carnatic and French power steadily extended northwards. The first step in the execution of this design was successful. Dupleix intervened in a dispute occasioned by the death of the ruler of Hyderabad, put his candidate on the throne, and so brought the State under his control. But when he tried the same game in the Carnatic, he found that the British had taken a hand and were backing their protégé against him. The result was open war between the Companies in India while their Governments were at peace in Europe. That it went

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and as such it was inevitably involved in the general complex of intrigue and strife. Its small but well-disciplined army was more than a match for those of its rivals provided that it met them singly. Thus, when the Nawab of Oudh rashly challenged its authority in Bengal, the lesson of Plassey was repeated at Buxar (1764). Oudh was not annexed, but it was obliged to become a dependent ally of the Company and to act as a protective buffer-state against possible danger from the north-west. Of the other 'powers' three were of major importance—the Marathas, who were now recovering from the catastrophe of Panipat and had substituted a loose confederacy for Sivaji's kingdom; Haidar Ali, a Moslem adventurer, who had usurped the throne of the old Hindu dynasty in Mysore and made it into a powerful and aggressive military state; and the Nizam of Hyderabad, who maintained an uneasy balance between his two stronger neighbours on one side and the Company on the other. The situation of the Company, controlling three widely separate areas and depending on constant reinforcement and supply from a faraway base in Europe, was bound to be precarious if those three 'powers', acting in concert and on interior strategic lines, should make a united and sustained attack.

Nor was the new British Raj in danger only from Indians. It was still in danger from the French. In the Seven Years War (1756-63), it is true, the British, aided as in Canada by their command of the sea, won a decisive victory at Wandewash (1760). But the peace, as before, was only a truce, since the French were determined to try to recover what they had lost, both in the east and in the west, at the first favourable opportunity. They continued, therefore, to play a part in Indian politics; and it was with the connivance of French agents at Indian courts and French commanders and instructors of Indian troops, that in 1779, when Britain had become enmeshed in the disastrous War of American Independence, a combination of the three 'powers' of the Deccan was at last brought about. The Marathas, who had previously been engaged in indecisive fighting with Bombay, leagued themselves with Haidar Ali and the Nizam, and a series of simultaneous attacks were planned on all the Company's territories. Never again till 1941-2 was the British footing in India so precarious. For, at the moment of greatest danger on land, they lost, as in 1941-2, the command of the sea. In 1780, the 'trading fleet' of over sixty ships, part bound for India with an indispensable cargo of supplies and munitions, was captured by a Spanish squadron.

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There remained the Marathas, the most formidable of the Company's enemies They were known to have established a liaison with the French, but the chance of a French army coming to their aid was destroyed by the Battle of the Nile in 1799 In 1800 a British fleet was dispatched from Bombay to close the exit from the Red Sea In 1801 a British force, landed at Aboukir, and a British Indian force, landed at Kosseir, compelled the French evacuation of Egypt Action had been taken, meantime, to cut the threads of French intrigue in the Middle East treaties of alliance were concluded with the Shah of Persia, with the Imam of Muscat, and with the Sultan of Lahej at Aden But the war with Napoleon was by no means over, though a peace was patched up in 1802, it lasted only fourteen months, and Wellesley continued to regard India primarily as an extension of the European battlefield In 1803 he intervened in the perennial disputes between the Maratha chiefs by giving military support to the Peshwa, the titular overlord of the confederacy, at the price of his recognition of British paramountcy The inevitable result was a war with the stronger chiefs—a successful war in which Wellesley's brother, Arthur began the career of victory that was to be crowned at Waterloo Of the four major chiefs two now accepted British suzerainty and one had already done so, but the fourth continued to assert his independence In 1804 Wellesley declared war on him and was in process of reversing the defeats he had suffered at the outset when he was recalled The Company's directors had been alarmed for some time by a policy of war and conquest which violated the principles laid down, as will be seen, by Parliament, and, now that the prospect of a French attack on India seemed to

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alliance were concluded with the border states of Sind, the Punjab and Afghanistan; permission was obtained from the Imam of Muscat for British-Indian troops to occupy one of his ports if it should be necessary thereby to forestall a French advance along the coast; and an attempt was made, unsuccessfully in 1808, successfully in 1810, to win the Shah of Persia over to the British side. At sea, while an invasion of India was no longer to be feared from Île de France, it continued to shelter those famous French privateers whose raids on British shipping were inflicting losses running at this time into several million pounds. In 1810, together with its satellite, Bourbon, it was attacked and captured. Finally, in 1811, came the occupation of Java.

At the peace settlement of 1814-15 Britain alone of the victorious coalition surrendered some of her conquests. Java and its neighbour-islands were restored to the Dutch—much to Napoleon's astonishment, it was reported at St. Helena—and Bourbon and their ports in India and Madagascar to the French. But Britain retained the Cape, Ceylon, Mauritius and the Seychelles, and presently acquired Aden. India might still be exposed to the possibility of attack overland, but not for a long time to come by sea. From 1815 to 1941 the British command of the Indian Ocean was undisputed.

This brief summary of a long and complex chapter of events suffices to show that the beginning of British rule in India was not prompted by what has come to be called 'imperialism'. It did not originate in British aggression. It was the outcome of anarchy in India aggravated by war in Europe—a war which Britain fought to save herself and thereby the rest of Europe from the domination of Napoleon. Extended to India, that war was still at root defensive. The British were resisting or forestalling attack. If Wellesley had more of a taste for conquest than Clive or Warren Hastings, if he thought that the extension of British rule in India was not only good for the Indians but augmented British power and prestige, nevertheless the mainspring of his militarism was in Europe. In Mysore and the Maharashtra he felt he was fighting Napoleon.

In the course of that fighting the British suffered one or two serious reverses, but usually they won their battles. This was not due to a lack of spirit in the Indian peoples. Indian soldiers could fight then with the same high courage with which they have faced the far worse terrors of modern war. British superiority lay mainly in military science and technology—in better strategy,

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### III

## The Expansion of British Rule

#### I THE MAKING OF BRITISH INDIA

THE statesmen and business-men who began to build a second British Empire on the ruins of the first were not bent on territorial aggrandisement. They did not foresee, still less design, either the Commonwealth of Nations or the Colonial Empire in the Tropics. The American Revolution had convinced them that an imperialism based on 'colonies' and 'possessions' was mistaken. They believed that Colonies in temperate zones, peopled by British emigrants, would sooner or later break away from Britain and that territorial annexation in tropical zones was profitless and unnecessary. Their new empire was to be an empire of the sea and an empire of trade. For the first only a minimum of territory was needed, that of those strategic bases—Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, Cape-town, Mauritius and the like—on which sea-power rested. For the second the only needs were footholds and facilities for traders. Roe's rule, in fact, was to be applied to the world at large. It had proved, it was true, impossible to keep it in India, but there need be, it was held, and there must be no further breaches of it. The rule may be said, indeed, to have been written into the British statute book, for the Act of 1784 (under which, as will be seen, the Company's Indian policy was effectively subjected to the British Government's control) contained an unusual clause forbidding the Governor-General and Council to make war, or to conclude a treaty likely to lead to war, on the ground that 'to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India are measures repugnant to the wish, the honour, and policy of this nation'. It was Wellesley's apparent repudiation of this doctrine that led to his recall in 1805.

But by 1815 this anti-territorial philosophy of empire was already being undermined. To British officials and soldiers in India, in the first place, conquest and dominion were naturally less repugnant than to ministers and merchants in London. Much of the fighting was stiff and costly, and it was only human to take a pride in victory. It was only human, too, to enjoy the exercise of power, and even the unimaginative Englishman was bound to feel how strange was the turn of fate which had made him and his companions from their little far-off island the masters of so

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## The Expansion of British Rule

### I THE MAKING OF BRITISH INDIA

THE statesmen and business-men who began to build a second British Empire on the ruins of the first were not bent on territorial aggrandisement. They did not foresee, still less design, either the Commonwealth of Nations or the Colonial Empire in the Tropics. The American Revolution had convinced them that an imperialism based on 'colonies' and 'possessions' was mistaken. They believed that Colonies in temperate zones, peopled by British emigrants, would sooner or later break away from Britain and that territorial annexation in tropical zones was profitless and unnecessary. Their new empire was to be an empire of the sea and an empire of trade. For the first only a minimum of territory was needed, that of those strategic bases—Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, Capetown, Mauritius and the like—on which sea-power rested. For the second the only needs were footholds and facilities for traders. Roe's rule, in fact, was to be applied to the world at large. It had proved, it was true, impossible to keep it in India, but there need be, it was held, and there must be no further breaches of it. The rule may be said, indeed, to have been written into the British statute book, for the Act of 1784 (under which, as will be seen, the Company's Indian policy was effectively subjected to the British Government's control) contained an unusual clause forbidding the Governor-General and Council to make war, or to conclude a treaty likely to lead to war, on the ground that 'to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India are measures repugnant to the wish, the honour, and policy of this nation'. It was Wellesley's apparent repudiation of this doctrine that led to his recall in 1805.

But by 1815 this anti-territorial philosophy of empire was already being undermined. To British officials and soldiers in India, in the first place, conquest and dominion were naturally less repugnant than to ministers and merchants in London. Much of the fighting was stiff and costly, and it was only human to take a pride in victory. It was only human, too, to enjoy the exercise of power, and even the unimaginative Englishman was bound to feel how strange was the turn of fate which had made him and his companions from their little far-off island the masters of so

we should rejoice that every inch of ground within the limits of India were subject to their [the Company's] sway'<sup>1</sup>

But the expansion of the British Raj was not determined by the arguments of militarists or moralists. It was dictated by the circumstances. Unless the British were prepared to evacuate India and leave it to be occupied by another Great Power, the scope of their authority was bound to expand through 'causes', as an able and upright British official put it, 'which we have not the power to control'.<sup>2</sup> Two systems of government so different in their standards and methods as were the British and the Indian in those days could not continue in existence side by side for any length of time. Other powerful and progressive nations whose borders have marched with those of backward and ill governed states have been confronted with a similar situation and with similar results. Sooner or later the one system has been compelled to take control, directly or indirectly, of the other. And it has seldom been possible to avoid the use of force. The weaker party, whether in over-confidence or in desperation, has usually challenged the stronger. Thus, though in the wars in India after Wellesley's day it was, with one exception, the Indians who attacked the British, their aggression was in a sense defensive. They were trying to save what remained of their freedom before it was too late.

Within ten years of Wellesley's recall the impossibility of maintaining the frontiers of British rule where he had left them was plain. His two immediate successors, Cornwallis and Barlow, by obeying their pacific instructions, only made the renewal of war more certain. The Marathas had been beaten but not broken, and their chiefs were bound to interpret the new policy as a confession of weakness. The British withdrawal, moreover, from intervention in Central India had opened the sluices to yet another flood of anarchy and rapine. A host of reckless adventurers, known as the Pindaris, who had joined the Marathas in war as a sort of irregular force maintained by a share of the loot, had continued to follow their trade in peace. Banded together in armies, equipped sometimes with artillery, they massacred and pillaged far and wide. Encouraged by British quiescence, they even crossed the Company's borders. In 1812 they raided Bihar. Nothing happened. In 1816 they raided the Northern Circars. This time Governor-General Moira (later Hastings) was ordered to suppress

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Company at the time of Napoleon's threat to India. Sind, overwhelmingly Moslem in population, was divided into three States, each ruled by a despotic Amir. Militarily far weaker than the Punjab, it could not be regarded as a potential danger to British India, and till 1838 the only point of friction with the Company lay in the Amirs' control of the trade-route down the Indus. The country was ill-governed. Sooner or later, no doubt, it would have shared the fate of other Indian States. But it might have retained at least a measure of domestic independence if its position had not been sharply affected by the reaction of events beyond its western frontier.

From about 1830 onwards there was a period of serious tension between Britain and Russia. It was believed in London that the Tsar's Government was not only cherishing those designs on Constantinople which led later on to the Crimean War, but that its policy of expansion in Central Asia was a new edition of Napoleon's plan for an overland attack on India. Whatever the real danger may have been in this 'Russian bogey', as it has sometimes been called, the attempt of Governor-General Auckland to forestall it was hasty and ill-conceived. To secure the buffer-state of Afghanistan against Russian infiltration and domination, he deposed its ruler, Dost Muhammad, installed a pro-British protégé on the throne and stationed a British force at Kabul to protect him. The Afghans rose in rebellion (1841-2). The British officials were killed. The British and Indian troops were surrounded and annihilated. Only one man out of 16 000 soldiers and camp followers escaped to tell the tale in India. The military situation was soon retrieved, but it was wisely decided to acquiesce in Dost Muhammad's recovery of his throne and to evacuate the country.

Sind lay across the more southerly routes that led through the mountains to Afghanistan, and in 1838, as a prelude to his disastrous Afghan adventure, Auckland insisted on the Amirs' permitting British troops to cross their territory. They reluctantly agreed, but, fearful of their own ultimate fate, they conspired against the intruders and violated, as far as they dared, the undertakings imposed on them. Inevitably their hostility was stiffened by the catastrophe in 1840. Yet the war—the only war in the annals of the British Raj which cannot be regarded as in some sense or in some degree defensive—might not have occurred if Auckland's successor, Ellenborough, had not thought it necessary to do something to counter the effect of the Afghan débâcle on British prestige. British public opinion, though it afterwards

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general rebellion of the Sikhs against their Government and its British friends. The second Sikh War followed, a war of two big battles. At Chillianwala the casualties on the British side were nearly 2,500 out of some 14 000—a high figure for the fighting of those days. Gujrat was a cheaper victory, and decisive. This time there could be no question of independence. The only doubt was as to whether the Punjab should still be nominally ruled by a Sikh maharaja with British officials and under British control or should come fully and directly under British rule. Hardinge's successor, Dalhousie, decided on the second course. In 1849 the Punjab was annexed to British India.

It remains to describe the substantial accretion of British territory in India which was effected otherwise than by war and conquest. It occurred towards the end of the period under review, and was the work of Dalhousie, than whom no Governor-General, not Wellesley himself, was more convinced that British rule was better for the ruled than Indian. He put on record his 'strong and deliberate opinion that the British Government is bound not to put aside or neglect such rightful opportunities of acquiring territory as may from time to time present themselves'.<sup>1</sup> The death of the rulers of a number of Indian States without natural heirs seemed to him just such a rightful opportunity, for these were States which had not been independent before the establishment of the British Raj but subject to other States which had now been brought under British control, and Dalhousie could therefore claim that his Government had inherited the traditional right to annex such States when their rulers left no natural heirs unless they had adopted heirs with that Government's assent. Various units, big and small, were taken over in accordance with this 'doctrine of lapse'. But there was one great territory to which it could not be applied. Though Oudh depended on British protection, it had not forfeited its domestic autonomy, and that unhappily had meant the continuance and indeed the aggravation of gross misgovernment.

A terrible picture of it has been preserved in the day to day record kept by Colonel Sleeman, Resident at Lucknow, when he travelled through the country in 1849-50.<sup>2</sup> He found—what indeed had long been common knowledge—that the whole fabric of law and order had broken down. The only instruments for keeping the peace were the ill-disciplined troops who often joined in the

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should Those promises were inspired solely by the practical exigencies of the period of expansion In order to strengthen the British position in the welter of strife and intrigue, it seemed expedient to purchase the alliance and assistance of this great ruler or of that small chief by undertaking to respect and protect his dynastic rights within his own domains

The extent of autonomy thus guaranteed varied with the size and standing of the State The compacts made with a smaller unit in which self government in any full sense was impossible, did little more than recognise the rights of a landlord, invested perhaps with a limited legislative and judicial authority, while they imposed a substantial measure of British control over the administration of his territory With the more important States the agreements—officially described as treaties, *sanads* or engagements—were of a more balanced or bilateral character The British Government for its part undertook certain obligations, which have come to be interpreted in the light of decisions made and action taken during the century and more that has elapsed since the agreements were first made To put it in technical terms, the relations between the British Government and the States are determined not only by the letter of the treaties but also by 'usage and sufferance' But the essential validity of the undertakings is not subject to legal disputation The hard core of them cannot be whittled away And that core may be broadly defined as a promise to maintain the territorial integrity of the States and the sovereignty of their dynastic rulers in all their internal affairs Two examples out of many may be cited The third article of the treaty with Bharatpur in 1803 guarantees that 'the British Government shall never interfere in the concerns of the Maharajah's country' <sup>1</sup> The second article of the treaty with Bikaner in 1818 declares that 'the British Government engages to protect the principality and territory of Bikaner', and the ninth article that 'the Maharajah of Bikaner and his heirs and successors shall be absolute rulers of their country and the British jurisdiction shall not be introduced into that principality' <sup>2</sup>

Thus the main difference between the results of the treaty-system and the results of annexation is clear In British India the previous rulers were deposed, their territory became British soil, their people British subjects In 'Indian India', on the other

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communications and other matters affecting India as a whole. Those were substantial concessions and obligations, but so was the boon they bought. British promises, backed by British power, gave the rulers of the States a security for their territories and themselves such as their predecessors had never enjoyed for any length of time.

All told, the States number no less than 562, but most of them are small, some only a few square miles in area and more like estates than States. About 100 of them are regarded as of superior rank. Of these Hyderabad in the Deccan is the largest with a population of 15 millions. In the north the most important is Kashmir (4 millions); in the south Mysore (7) and Travancore (7); in the west Baroda (2½), Gwalior (4), Indore (1½), and the States of Rajputana (11½).

Though the geographical layout is a patchwork, it has a certain broad coherence. Taken together the States constitute a great cruciform barrier, broken by gaps of varying width, but more or less effectively separating the different parts of British India from one another. The strategic and economic implications of this fact are plain.

### 3. THE MUTINY

When Dalhousie left India in 1856 the British Raj had been established, as has been seen, directly or indirectly, over the whole of India. In 1857 it was suddenly challenged by the rebellion known to history as the 'Indian Mutiny'.

Up to a point 'mutiny' is the proper word. It was the sepoys of the Bengal Army, recruited mainly from Moslems and high-caste Hindus from more martial areas than Bengal, who began the revolt and did most to sustain it. And the reason why they mutinied is clear. Despite all the official caution to be described in a later chapter, they had come to believe that the ultimate intention of their British rulers was to subvert their faith. This suspicion was strengthened when, with a view to the need of garrisons in Burma, Dalhousie proposed and his successor, Canning, decreed that enlistments should be made for service outside as well as inside India—a deliberate attempt, it seemed, to break down the rule of caste which forbade the crossing of salt water. Suspicion became certainty when new rifles were served out which necessitated the biting-off of greased cartridge ends—an unpardonable blunder, since the grease was animal fat, and the cow was sacred to Hindus and the pig the essence of pollution to Mos-

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recover their independence on the contrary Sikh and other Punjabi volunteers marched to join the British force at Delhi—a remarkable testimony to the work of the brilliant little group of British officials who had been entrusted with the administration of the conquered Punjab after 1849. Southern India, on the whole, stayed quiet. None of the rulers of the leading States, who held the strategic keys of Central India joined in the revolt. Canning indeed, went so far as to describe them as 'breakwaters to the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave'.<sup>1</sup> Nor was there any anti-British feeling on India's borders. Dost Muhammad at Kabul was scrupulously faithful to his treaty of friendship with the British Indian Government. Nepal sent a force to its aid in Oudh.

On the great mass of the population, the countryfolk, the Mutiny had little effect outside the areas of disturbance. Within those areas they cowered in their villages praying for the trouble to end, for, wherever orderly government broke down, the lawless elements—the bad characters, the broken men, the professional criminals—seized their chance and turned on their helpless neighbours, killing and looting. Old private feuds, too, broke out afresh and debtors turned on moneylenders and burnt their books. That aspect of the Mutiny was proof, if it were wanted, of the need for a strong administration in a country where so much that was primitive and barbarous still lurked beneath the crust of civilisation.

Limited though it was in range and short in duration, the Mutiny was none the less a terrible tragedy. Maybe a trial of strength some time between the old régime and the new could only have been avoided by a wisdom and capacity beyond the scope of ordinary men. Maybe, too, it served the peace and welfare of an India as yet incapable of governing itself that the power of its alien governors should be so irresistibly displayed. But, while the record of both races in those black months has its heroic pages, it is also stained by acts of passion and brutality. The atrocities committed by the mutineers, especially the slaughter of the British prisoners and the murder of the British women and children at Cawnpore, horrified the civilised world in that placid mid-Victorian age at least as much as the immeasurably greater crimes of the Nazis in our own day, and they were avenged on the spot and in hot blood by some, though by no means all, of the British soldiers in command with small regard for justice or humanity till Canning reimposed the rule of law. Outside the area of the fighting the wrath and

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recover their independence on the contrary Sikh and other Punjabi volunteers marched to join the British force at Delhi—a remarkable testimony to the work of the brilliant little group of British officials who had been entrusted with the administration of the conquered Punjab after 1849. Southern India, on the whole, stayed quiet. None of the rulers of the leading States, who held the strategic keys of Central India, joined in the revolt. Canning indeed, went so far as to describe them as 'breakwaters to the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave'.<sup>1</sup> Nor was there any anti-British feeling on India's borders. Dost Muhammad at Kabul was scrupulously faithful to his treaty of friendship with the British Indian Government. Nepal sent a force to its aid in Oudh.

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Limited though it was in range and short in duration, the Mutiny was none the less a terrible tragedy. Maybe a trial of strength some time between the old régime and the new could only have been avoided by a wisdom and capacity beyond the scope of ordinary men. Maybe, too, it served the peace and welfare of an India as yet incapable of governing itself that the power of its alien governors should be so irresistibly displayed. But, while the record of both races in those black months has its heroic pages, it is also stained by acts of passion and brutality. The atrocities committed by the mutineers, especially the slaughter of the British prisoners and the murder of the British women and children at Cawnpore, horrified the civilised world in that placid mid-Victorian age at least as much as the immeasurably greater crimes of the Nazis in our own day, and they were avenged on the spot and in hot blood by some, though by no means all, of the British soldiers in command with small regard for justice or humanity till Canning reimposed the rule of law. Outside the area of the fighting the wrath and

<sup>1</sup> Thompson and Garratt *op cit* p. 468

## Part Two

# THE BRITISH RAJ

### I

## The Political Aspect

### I THE INTERVENTION OF PARLIAMENT

**A**N attempt must now be made to sketch in the baldest outline the primary features of British rule in India

That the Raj made a discreditable start is not in question. The black facts of the decade or so after Plassey are well known—the misrule and misery of Bengal and the great fortunes amassed by the Company's servants partly, as Clive protested by openly accepting presents in accordance with immemorial Indian custom, partly in even more disreputable ways. Less familiar is the unsavoury scandal of the Nabob of Arcot's debts—the organised exploitation of a ruler's extravagance by a group of British sharks. The cause of all this is also not in doubt. It was the inevitable result, human nature being what it is, of power without responsibility. The Company's servants were the masters of Bengal and other territories but they were not responsible for their government. Though it was they and their Indian agents rather than the puppets on the throne who were in fact obeyed they still regarded themselves as traders only, and, since they had always been tacitly allowed to implement their nominal salaries by trading on their own account, some of them used their power to enrich themselves without any sense of the duty towards the Indian people which the possession of that power implied.

If this period of exploitation in its sinister sense was inevitable, so was its end as soon as British public opinion became aware of what was happening in India. The disclosure was brought about mainly in two ways. First the disorganisation of Bengal, however profitable for the Company's individual servants on the spot, meant a steep fall in the dividends of its shareholders at home. Secondly, there could be no mistaking the significance of the 'Nabobs' as they were called, the men who had been coming home still in the prime of life, yet very wealthy, and proceeding to buy their way into society and even into Parliament. The reaction was threefold. There was a business reaction. It was

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Under this so-called 'dual system' the Company continued to carry on its business. It was not till 1813 that it was deprived of its monopoly of Eastern trade except with China and in tea, and not till 1833 that its commercial side was finally wound up. But after 1784 it ceased to be only or even primarily a business concern: it had become primarily an instrument of government, which, like any other instrument of British government at home or overseas, was under the ultimate control of the British Parliament and people. The twofold purpose to which that control was to be directed was defined by Pitt when he introduced the bill. It was intended, he told the House of Commons, on the one hand 'to confirm and enlarge the advantages derived by this country from its connexion with India' and on the other hand 'to render that connexion a blessing to the native Indians'.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. BUREAUCRACY

The government of British India by Councils of officials at the Centre and in the Provinces,<sup>2</sup> confirmed by the Act of 1784, was to be modified in course of time by the intrusion of unofficial and popular elements; but this process, which will be described in the next part of this book, did not begin till 1861 and did not lead to any real transfer of legislative power till 1909 or of executive power till 1919. Till the twentieth century the British Raj was a pure and highly centralised bureaucracy, with an unbroken chain of official responsibility running from the Provinces to the Centre and from the Centre on to the British Government and Parliament. But the word 'bureaucracy' may be misleading if it suggests that the officials were all working at their desks in government offices: they were mostly out in the country and out of doors. Nor, of course, did the 'bureaucrats' enjoy a privileged legal status. There was no *droit administratif*. Like officials in England they were subject to the ordinary law.

The main crank of this great machine of government was the administrative corps which came to be called the Indian Civil Service. In character and purpose its members were very different

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches* (1806 ed.), i. 118.

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'Centre' and 'Central' were not applied till recent times to the Government of British India as a whole in contradistinction to the 'local' or Provincial Governments; but for the sake of clarity the terms will be used henceforward in this book. Similarly, though Bengal, Madras and Bombay retained the title of Presidencies till 1919, they will be called Provinces as they have been since then.

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perhaps a million or more inhabitants Till, in relatively recent times the administration became more elaborate, office work increased, and new social services were established with their own personnel, the District Officer's duties were not only of almost infinite variety, they brought him into personal contact with the poor and ignorant countryfolk entrusted to his care—looking after their humble needs, listening to their grievances, settling their disputes, advising on their crops trying to persuade them to make their villages cleaner and healthier, and so forth He knew it was good work he was doing, and he knew, too, that the countryfolk appreciated it 'We are his children,' they would say of him 'he is our *ma bap*, our mother and father' And for the fortunate who rose to the top the sense of exercising this paternal power deepened with the broadening of its scope It was a great thing to be responsible for directing and superintending the government of a Province—a country, it might be of forty or fifty million people

Next in importance to the I C S was the Indian Police Service, now known as the I P, who were recruited from much the same class as the I C S, but usually at the pre university stage Later came the new technical Services—education, agriculture, forestry, public works,<sup>1</sup> and so on—but, unlike the I C S and I P which were mainly British in personnel, they soon contained a substantial proportion of Indians And, ranking beneath these so-called Superior or All India Services, were the multitudinous Provincial Services staffed entirely by Indians The growth of nationalist agitation in course of time was bound to create the impression that the great bureaucracy it assailed was composed of foreigners, and foreigners, it is true, controlled it and held most of its key positions But of its total personnel—in 1900, for example—over 500 000 were Indian and only about 4 000 British

The British fraction might well have been even smaller for, from about 1820 onwards, some of the ablest and most far-sighted British officials strongly criticised the policy of keeping all the higher administrative posts—those, in fact, that were held by the members of the I C S—in British hands Munro believed that the surest method of educating Indians for ultimate self government was 'to give them a higher opinion of themselves by employing them in important situations and perhaps by rendering them eligible to almost every office under Government' \* 'I regret as

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unnatural that the British authorities in India should feel that the great administrative machine which they had made and in which they took a proper pride would not be run so well by Indians. There was also at a later stage, the question of security. If the growth of a militant nationalism was from one standpoint an argument for Indianising the administration, from another it was an argument for maintaining its strength and unity.

### 3 LAW AND LIBERTY

If the bureaucracy of the British Raj was a kind of despotism, it was a very different kind from that which the Indian people had experienced before the British came.

In the first place, the British Raj was stronger than any of its predecessors, stronger even than the Mogul Empire, and thus enabled it to keep India, as never before, safe from attack without and united and at peace within. The old menace of invasion was dispelled. No hostile army crossed the frontier till 1942.<sup>1</sup> The countryside was no longer swept from time to time by warring and rapacious hosts. The main highways were no longer infested by bands of brigands. Villagers could sleep of nights; their lives and property were safer now than they had ever been.

Secondly, the British Raj replaced arbitrary despotism by the rule of law. By becoming British subjects many millions of Indians acquired 'a government of laws, not of men', and therewith as full a protection of their personal rights by impersonal justice and as wide a measure of civil liberty as any people in the world enjoyed. As to the content of the law, the existing laws were consolidated and codified in accordance with 'the indisputable principle', as a British parliamentary committee put it, 'that the interests of the Native subjects are to be consulted in preference to those of Europeans whenever the two come into competition, and that therefore the laws ought to be adapted rather to the feelings and habits of the Natives than to those of Europeans'.<sup>2</sup> The adoption of English judicial procedure, it is sometimes argued, was unwise, since it was ill suited to the backward conditions of Indian country life. But otherwise the creation of the new courts of justice was an almost unqualified gain. They obtained, wrote an experienced Indian nationalist, 'a prestige and authority unknown in Asia'.

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It may be said, lastly, that, if the British Raj was not 'government by consent of the governed', it was government with their acquiescence. The proof of that lies in the fact that in a country not much smaller than Europe, with a population rising by the end of the nineteenth century towards 300 millions, there were only about 60,000 British soldiers and about 4,000 British officials. So small a 'garrison' would have been an absurdity if the mass of the Indian people had felt that British rule was intolerably unjust or inhumane. That they learned to believe in its justice has already been remarked. As to its humanity, by the normal standards of Western civilization, the record speaks for itself. There is only one serious stain on it since the repression of the Mutiny—the tragedy at Amritsar in 1919. In the spring of that year, when the Afghans were on the point of advancing on the frontier in the hope of raising the hillsmen and invading India, a wave of revolutionary turbulence ran through the Punjab.<sup>1</sup> Outbreaks of violence and disorder occurred in several towns. In Amritsar itself four Englishmen were murdered and an Englishwoman assaulted and left for dead. To General Dyer, to whom the civil officer had surrendered his authority, the situation seemed so critical that on learning that, in defiance of a proclamation he had issued, a crowd had collected in a walled enclosure in the town, he led a section of Gurkha soldiers to the spot, and, opening fire without warning, killed 379 and left some 1200 wounded on the ground. It was probably Dyer's estimate of the immediate local danger that prompted this conduct at the time, but he afterwards declared that he had intended to check the spread of rebellion throughout the Punjab by a deliberate act of terrorism. Some of his compatriots accepted and applauded this interpretation. Subscriptions were raised in India and in Britain to present him with an honorarium. But that was not the judgement of the authorities when, after a belated inquiry, the full facts were known. Dyer was deprived of his command and censured by the Government of India, the Commander-in-Chief in India, and the British Army Council. These measures were approved by the House of Commons after a tense debate in which the decisive speech was made by Mr. Churchill. He affirmed

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## II

### The Economic Aspect

#### I ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

NEXT to the maintenance of security and the establishment of law and order, the British Government was confronted with the huge task of providing India with the material equipment of a modern state. It was a poor country. Nine-tenths of its people were engaged in wringing a bare subsistence from the soil, there were relatively few towns, and the rural districts—so few and bad were the roads—were virtually isolated from one another and still more from the outer world. Production was mainly for local consumption. Recurrent shortages in the local rainfall meant starvation on a ghastly scale.

The first immediate economic need—and it was no less required for strategic and administrative purposes—was a better system of communications. Already before the Mutiny new trunk roads and innumerable lesser roads and bridges had been built, steamship services provided on the greater rivers, ports enlarged and improved, and the construction of railways begun, and with the railways came the telegraph and a cheap and uniform postal service.

The second immediate need was irrigation—to combat drought and to improve the yield and extend the area of cultivation—and even more impressive than the spread of the network of rails and wires over India was the cutting of canals through its thirsty sun-baked soil. By 1900 India possessed far the greatest system of irrigation in the world. Before the present war more than 32 million acres of British India were watered by Government works. Large areas, especially in the dry north-west, which had been nothing but arid wilderness, were transformed into fertile crop-land, and on much of it hundreds of thousands of peasants from overcrowded districts found new homes and means of livelihood.

Railways and canals facilitated the task of grappling with famine. Besides direct measures for the relief of destitution and unemployment, it was possible now to bring surplus food in bulk from more fortunate areas. 'Famine policy' became one of the major preoccupations of the Central and Provincial Governments, till the inevitably recurring periods of excessive drought no longer meant, as hitherto they had so often meant, that the population of

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Bombay, rich Hindu merchants in Calcutta, grew richer still, and in course of time the Indian business world, aided by the experience and technique of British pioneers, was able both to launch out on its own and also to obtain an increasing share in the control and the profits of British firms. To day the major part of the capital invested in joint stock companies is passing from British into Indian hands.

One result of the new economic order was a steady rise in the value of India's export trade. In 1834 it had been under £8 millions. In 1855 it was roughly £23 millions, in 1870 £53, in 1900 £69, in 1910 £137, in 1928 £250. The goods exported were now mostly primary products—jute, cotton, grains and pulse, hides, oil-seeds, minerals—for India had been caught in the economic currents which the Industrial Revolution in the West had sent running all over the world. In the old days Indian yarns and calico, mainly produced by village craftsmen, had been exchanged for British bullion. Now in India, as earlier in Britain, village industries were doomed to a swift and steep decline by the growth of the factories. This would presumably have been their fate if the British had never come to India. Indian capitalism was not imported from abroad and sooner or later Indian capitalists would have built the mills which now supply most of the cloth that Indians need. But, till that happened, it was mainly British yarn or cloth that swamped the Indian market. Other manufactures were also pouring in, not only the lighter goods, but the heavy stuff needed for the railways and other engineering works and presently for the equipment of Indian industry. Hence the value of India's imports rose beside that of the exports. In 1834 it was roughly £4½ millions, in 1855 £13½, in 1870 £33½, in 1900 £51, in 1910 £86, in 1928 £190.

The volume of British trade with India in this period ranged between one fifth and one seventh of the volume of all Britain's overseas trade, and it constituted a much larger share of India's overseas trade than that enjoyed by any other nation. This was the 'natural' result of the Raj—of the connexion it had established between India and Britain, of the use of the English language it promoted, of its linking up of Indian with British currency, and so forth. It was not the result of any 'unnatural' aids or restrictions. No more in the nineteenth than in the seventeenth century was there any attempt at a monopoly. Nor did the British Government—with one exception to be noted presently—try to foster British trade by such means as most other Western Govern-

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direct domestic concern they could have their own way. When, for example, in 1858-9 the Canadian Finance Minister raised his tariff in order to protect the infant industries of Canada from British and American competition, he met the protests of the British Colonial Secretary, backed by British manufacturers with the firm assertion that a self governing Canada must govern herself. A self governing India would certainly have taken the same line.

India was to obtain her fiscal autonomy in course of time, but not before the difference in her political status had been harshly underlined by the sorry business of the excise duties. When the old low revenue tariff was restored in 1894 the Lancashire manufacturers, who sent one quarter of their cotton goods to India, insisted that a countervailing excise must be levied on the products of Indian cotton mills. They appealed to the principle of free competition, but they could not argue, as the Free Trade statesmen of an earlier day had honestly argued, that their policy was as much in the interests of Indian consumers as of British producers. On that point the British authorities in India had no doubts, but, at a time when the balance of parties in the House of Commons was fairly even, the voting power of the Lancashire members proved decisive and Governor General Elgin and his colleagues were overruled—one of the very few occasions on which such overruling from Whitehall has occurred in a matter of first-rate importance. The final upshot was the reduction of the import duty on cloth to 3½ per cent, the imposition of an excise duty of 3½ per cent on all cloth produced in Indian mills, and the exemption of yarn from both import and excise duties. It was a short-sighted policy, for it did more than anything else to strengthen Indian distrust of British motives and impair the goodwill on which in the long run all trade depends.<sup>1</sup>

At the time the duties were imposed, the political situation which made it possible had already begun to change, and a few years later, as will be recorded in a subsequent chapter, India began to tread the Colonial path towards self-government. In 1917 the development of responsible government was declared to be the aim of British policy, and soon afterwards, as if in anticipation of its ultimate issue in Dominion status, India was conceded a substantial measure of fiscal autonomy.<sup>2</sup> The immediate

<sup>1</sup> The import duties on cotton goods were presently raised to 11 per cent while the excise duty remained at 3½. The latter was suspended in 1925 and abolished in 1926.

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financed from such a relatively meagre revenue. Loans were plainly needed, and they were obtained by issues of Government of India stock on the British and the Indian market. The former was known as 'sterling debt', the latter as 'rupee debt'. Up to the outbreak of the last war, the average rate of interest on both was only about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent, because Indian administration was under the ultimate control of the Secretary of State and Parliament. Japan, for instance, could not hope to get such favourable terms: the average charge on her overseas public debt was  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Moreover, the debt incurred on the railways (most of which were built by private companies with a Government guarantee to begin with, but were successively bought up by Government in course of time) and on the canals (which, apart from one or two minor and unsuccessful private ventures, were a Government concern from the outset) proved to be 'productive' debt. The canals quite soon, the railways more slowly, began to yield profits higher than the interest charges. Thus India has been in a fortunate position with regard to the bulk of her National Debt—an almost unique position, since few other countries can have such a very high proportion of their public debt secured by productive assets—and it has been still further improved in the course of the present war. The 'sterling debt', the part owed to Britain, which amounted in 1937 to £357 millions,<sup>1</sup> has now been 'repatriated' against the sterling received on account of the British Government's large expenditure for war purposes in India. The financial roles have thus been reversed. Owing to the cost of the war in South East Asia, Britain is now heavily in debt to India.

The normal requirements of administration could not be met so easily by loans, and, if much has been left undone that wanted doing, the main reason has been that there was not money enough to do it. The chief source of revenue, till twenty years ago, was the land. The British Government inherited from the Indian rulers they supplanted the traditional right to acquire, as ultimate owners of the soil, a proportion of its yield. This rent or tax had normally been levied in kind—one third of the gross produce was a customary rate under the later Moguls—but it was now all levied in cash, and for this purpose an elaborate process of assessment and periodical reassessment was carried out. At the end of the nineteenth century it was roughly reckoned that the average tax on an acre was not more than one-tenth of the value of its yield or about two shillings a year. After the land tax, which in those days provided

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in some of those cases at any rate, the defence of India was only distantly or indirectly involved, and in course of time it became a common charge that Indian lives were sacrificed to 'imperial adventures'. And Indian money too: for the cost of the Indian troops on the earlier of those campaigns was borne by Indian taxpayers.<sup>1</sup> In the World Wars of our own day the security of India has been directly threatened, and her contributions to their cost (about £140 millions in the first war, a vastly larger sum in the second) have been contributions to her own self-defence. At the same time, in each of the two wars, the maintenance of the Indian Army outside India has been paid for by the British Government. Shortly before 1939, moreover, the British Government undertook to bear three-quarters of the cost of modernising and mechanising the Indian Army or about £25 millions. It must also be borne in mind that India paid only a relatively small subsidy (about £130,000 a year) towards the cost of the protection to her shores and trade afforded by the British Navy. The self-governing Colonies had paid such subsidies before they attained Dominion Status and built up their own navies; and in 1938, in accordance with Dominion precedent, India ceased to pay the subsidy on undertaking to establish a squadron of modern sloops.

On the eve of the recent war the proportion of total British Indian revenues spent on defence was no longer quite so high as it had been in the nineteenth century, but it was still about 25 per cent. When the cost of administrative salaries and pensions and of debt charges and of roads and bridges and other public works was added, there was no room for high expenditure on social services. In education, for example, an attempt by the State to do in India what it had begun to do in Europe in the later nineteenth century would have entailed an outlay far beyond its means. A good deal was done. There are now fifteen universities in India, over 300 colleges, over 3,000 high schools. In 1939 over eleven million children were attending primary schools. But a system of universal primary education—the provision and upkeep of innumerable village schools, the training and payment of a host of teachers in

<sup>1</sup> Indian nationalists also complained that the cost of recruiting and training British troops before they were stationed in India for its defence was charged on Indian revenues. This matter was settled in 1933 when the British Government undertook to pay £1½ millions (raised in 1939 to £2 millions) in relief of Indian defence expenditure on the ground that (a) the British forces in India were ready for action in an emergency, especially in the Far East, and (b) they obtained in India a training for active service unobtainable elsewhere.

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stunted? The answer to that question is more complex. It was partly due to the slow and relatively slight development of large-scale industry, the means by which the prosperous countries of the West were able to absorb their growing populations and to increase the value of their individual output. But India could never have become a predominantly industrial country like Britain or Belgium: the bulk of her people had to be employed on the land, and in the last analysis the economic backwardness of India is inseparable from the backwardness of Indian agriculture. For that, unhappily, there was no easy remedy. For it was not only due to the ignorance and conservatism of the Indian peasant or to insecure tenures and inequitable rents in those parts of the country in which 'landlordism' still prevailed, or to the customary 'fragmentation' of agricultural holdings. It was also due to the rigid traditions of Indian society. If caste and the Hindu family system encourage fellowship and mutual help between their members, they also tend to discourage individual initiative, and there is no economic activity in India that has not been impaired, directly or indirectly, by the seclusion and subordination of women, both Moslem and Hindu. The custom, again, of costly marriage ceremonies and high dowries has involved the Hindu peasant in a load of debt so strangling that most of what he can produce above the mere means of life is appropriated by the moneylender—a fate to which the Moslem peasant, too, has usually succumbed. Religion, also, has obstructed progress: the Hindu veneration of the cow virtually prohibits the development of a successful pastoral industry. And behind those checks and drawbacks of Indian creed and custom lies the lack of vitality due to disease and an insufficient or ill-balanced diet.

But, when all is said, the main cause of Indian poverty remains the high birth rate. More Indians have been born than India could comfortably maintain. All the efforts that have been made to enhance productive capacity—by irrigation, by improvements in agricultural technique, by sanitation, by industrial development—have been swamped by the rising flood of human beings, and it is hard to believe that the far-reaching schemes now being canvassed for raising the standard of Indian life can prove more than partially successful unless somehow the birth-rate is reduced.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from the foregoing that it lay beyond the power of an alien Government to grapple with the root causes of Indian poverty. It might have done more to hasten the growth of indus-

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### III

## Balance Sheet

#### I GAIN AND LOSS

THE connexion between Britain and India has been much more than a matter of politics and economies. It has furnished an example of 'culture contact' on a vast scale, and, though the influence of British political ideas on Indian minds can be easily detected and defined, the same cannot be said about the impact on Indian life of all that is meant by Western civilisation or the counter reaction of Indian on British thought or the effect of the personal relations between innumerable Britons and Indians. A scientific attempt, indeed, to assess the worth of the British Raj to each of the two countries would involve so many imponderable factors that it might well daunt the most self confident investigator. The whole subject, moreover, is nowadays highly controversial. For a long time to come no two verdicts, especially if one is British and the other Indian, are likely to be the same. However objective they may try to be, British and Indian patriots must view the picture from different angles and be affected in some degree by an inescapable, if unconscious, bias. Yet some judgement, however rough and cursory and limited in scope, must needs be ventured here for no one can understand the theme of the forthcoming chapters—the process of India's liberation—unless he has formed some opinion as to the nature and results of India's subjection and the gains and losses it has involved for both the countries concerned.

The British balance sheet is the easier to compile. Nearly all the main items are on the credit side, and their value is indisputable. First, the British occupation of India has provided a strategic base protecting the 'life-line' of the Empire, by sea and air, across the Indian Ocean from Aden to Singapore and on to Australia and New Zealand. Secondly, India has been one of the safest fields of British overseas investment and trade. Thirdly, though as has just been said, the effect of the connexion between Britain and India on the culture of each country cannot be precisely measured and though it has clearly been much stronger and more pervasive in India, yet it has been by no means negligible in Britain. The modern sciences of comparative philology and comparative religion were founded on the study of the Hindu

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world-economy; and the material profit of this revolution, though much of it has been taken by British business and though it has not much relieved the poverty of the great rural majority of the Indian people, has been increasingly shared by all other classes of Indian society. Fourthly, the closer connexion with the West involved in British rule has made it easier for the Indian intelligentsia to draw, for what it was worth to them, on the storehouse of Western culture, the science, philosophy, art and literature of all the Western world.<sup>1</sup>

So much for the credit side of the account. On the debit side stand all the disadvantages inherent in the one hard fact that British rule has been foreign rule.

## 2. THE NATIONALIST AUDIT

It is only in relatively recent times that India's political subjection has come to be regarded by most Indian politicians as completely upsetting the balance of gain and loss to India resulting from the British Raj. Till some sixty years ago the drawbacks of foreign rule seemed outweighed by the benefits it brought with it, and not least the opportunity it gave to Indians to outgrow it and dispense with it by providing the framework and the training needed for self-government. At one time, indeed, educated Indian opinion may be said to have been too pro-British. It was not only in politics that the British way of doing things was accepted as the obvious model for an inexperienced India: there was a tendency to decry the whole historic tradition of Indian life and thought and to hold that India could only recover her place in the world by turning her back on her past and acquiring to the fullest possible extent the practical virtues of the West. This soon provoked a healthy reaction, but there were other reasons for the growth of a more critical appraisal of the British Raj. In the first place the value of its greatest gifts—external security and internal unity—was apt to be forgotten or underestimated as the conditions of Indian life before the British took control faded from living memory. The peril of invasion was no more thought about in India than in Britain till the catastrophes of 1940 and 1942 brought it so sensationally near. It needed, similarly, the widening of the communal gulf after 1937, the raising of the banner of Pakistan, the sombre talk of civil war, to recall the disruption and anarchy

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have least sympathised with Indian aspirations have been most considerate of Indian feelings. Unfortunately, however, Englishmen in India have not all been gentlemen, whether by upbringing or nature, too many of them—and of Englishwomen also—have claimed from Indians, whatever their respective stations in life, a deference inconceivable on any grounds but those of race and, worse still, have sometimes enforced the claim with unpardonable insolence. Such conduct, it need hardly be said, has always been sternly reprobated by the authorities, but public opinion in the British community at large has failed to make it impossible for such things to happen, and there was one notorious occasion on which the lesson in race-relations taught by those petty individual incidents was driven home collectively. In 1883, when the liberal-minded Governor-General Ripon sponsored a bill which made it possible for a British resident in India to be tried by an Indian for a criminal offence, the storm raised by the unofficial British community was so violent that Ripon was constrained to bow to it and amend the bill. No doubt, in all the circumstances, some such agitation was inevitable—there have been similar reactions to similar situations in other parts of the world—but few of those who took part in it seem to have realised or cared what conclusions educated Indians were bound to draw.<sup>1</sup>

Such demonstrations of a claim to racial superiority became more intolerable as nationalism strengthened its hold on Indian minds. For the principle of equal status for all nations, great and small is the cardinal doctrine of nationalism in revolt, and the main reason why an Indian patriot longs for India's freedom is that he resents the inferior position which, despite her ancient civilisation and historic past, she now occupies in the society of nations. If this is natural, so also is the patriot's tendency to shy away from the plain fact that that inferior position must needs have been the result, in some degree at any rate, of Indian weaknesses. Naturally, too, a sense of wounded pride may carry him further. He may persuade himself that India was enjoying a millennium before the British came and that her failure to take her

<sup>1</sup> The present writer recalls this subject of relations between Englishmen and Indians cropping up in the course of conversation with three leading Indian nationalists. The first, a politician spoke with evident emotion of an Englishman who had been like a father to him in his early days and whose portrait was hanging on the wall. The second, a lawyer, spoke bitterly of how his father had once been hustled from a railway carriage by an Englishman who wanted it to himself. The third, an industrialist, had never forgotten that, when he was a young clerk in a British firm he had not been allowed to use the lift because he was an Indian.

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was introducing a bill for the better government of India drafted by Whig Ministers on the morrow of their triumph in 1832, but he could not claim that like other ministerial measures—the Abolition of Slavery Act, for example, of that same year—this bill advanced the cause of freedom. He confessed that British despotism in India was an anomaly, and he could only plead that it was already better than most of the despotisms on record and that it could be made better still by grafting onto it ‘those blessings which are the natural fruits of liberty’. But the only really good government he declared was representative government, and despotism at its best was only to be tolerated in India because nobody denied, not even so staunch a champion of pure democracy as James Mill, that representative government was ‘wholly out of the question’ in India at that time.<sup>1</sup> The paradox, in fact, could not be resolved until as a result of a lengthy process of education that ‘proudest day’ arrived.

Meanwhile, it seemed there could be little change in the existing system. Macaulay, indeed, was at pains to warn the Commons against hasty innovations. India, he pointed out, was unique. There were no precedents to go by.

The light of political science and of history is withdrawn—we are walking in darkness—we do not distinctly see whither we are going. It is the wisdom of man so situated to feel his way and not to plant his foot till he is well assured that the ground before him is firm.

The Act of 1833 accordingly, was a cautious measure. The Government of British India was still to be a purely official government. Executive authority was vested as before in a Supreme or Central Government of India, which was also to continue for the time being to act as the Government of Bengal. It was still to consist of the Governor General and three full Members of Council, but a fourth member was now added for purposes of legislation only. Subject to the Central Government’s ‘superintendence, direction, and control’, executive authority was still vested also in the Governors of Madras and Bombay and their corresponding Councils. Legislative authority, which had previously been exercised by all the Presidencies, was now reserved to the Central Government alone.

Thus the Act of 1833 made no substantial change. But, if British rule in India remained a kind of despotism, it was a different kind from that which it replaced. As has already been

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Councils Act did not regard it in that light. They saw no more distinctly whither they were going than their predecessors in 1833. The Act was not inspired by any long-range theories about the future: it was a characteristic British response to an immediate practical need.

The Mutiny had taken the British Government completely by surprise, and it was the shock of it that brought about what had long been impending, the final abolition of the dual system initiated in 1784,<sup>1</sup> the dissolution of the Company, the transference of all responsibility for Indian government directly to the Crown, and the consequential creation of a new Secretary of State for India. But more than that was needed. The Mutiny had revealed a deplorable lack of contact and understanding between Indian public opinion and the Government; and it seemed foolish to continue, as Sir Bartle Frere put it, 'to legislate for millions of people with few means of knowing except by a rebellion whether the laws suit them or not'.<sup>2</sup> It was decided, therefore, to extend the process of enlarging the Governor-General's Council for legislative purposes. The Act of 1833, as has been seen, had added one extra member to it. Under an Act of 1853 it had grown to a total of twelve. The Act of 1861 empowered the Governor-General to nominate twelve more legislative Members and prescribed that half of them—unlike all the other Members who were required to have been in the administrative or judicial service of the Government—should be 'non-officials'. Most of them, it was understood, would be Indians.

Since this association of Indians with Central legislation was clearly not enough to meet the needs of the case, the policy of centralisation adopted in 1833 was reversed. The Act restored the legislative function to Madras and Bombay, provided for its exercise by Bengal and any new Province that might be created, and enlarged the Provincial Councils in the same way as the Central Council.

These were practical measures with a limited objective, and nobody realised at the time that in admitting Indians to the Councils and restoring powers to the Provinces a dual process of 'Indianisation' and decentralisation had been started which was to lead, stage by stage, to Indian self-government. The Act of 1861 was not inspired by Macaulay's vision of a distant future.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 43-4 above.

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far wider political conceptions than merely English or European practice can supply and a much more profound study of Indian experience and of the conditions of Indian government than either English politicians or those who supply the English public with opinions have hitherto shown any willingness to undertake <sup>1</sup>

Mill did not specify what Indian conceptions he had in mind, but he cannot have been thinking of any Indian tradition of large-scale representative government In Southern India it was an ancient custom for the headman of a village to convoke a committee of elders, known as a *panchayat*,<sup>2</sup> to give an arbitral decision on a dispute between villagers From this kernel a simple form of village self government might possibly have been developed, and some British officials of the pre-Mutiny period—Elphinstone in Bombay, Munro in Madras—attempted to preserve old *panchayats* and to establish new ones But little came of it Most of the *panchayats* withered away, not only in British India but also, where they had existed, in the Indian States This was not only due to the centralising tendencies of a more active and efficient Provincial or State administration The villagers themselves preferred, despite the cost, to take their quarrels to the new courts with their trained judges and lawyers and with all the prestige of Government behind them That, no doubt was the chief reason why a more persistent effort was not made to retain and multiply the *panchayats*, to develop them into village councils with administrative functions, and so to root the growth of Indian self-government in Indian soil

Apart from the *panchayats* there was no guidance to be found in Indian tradition for the development of representative government If it had ever existed in India on a larger scale, all knowledge of it was lost in the distant past. Mill's prescription, therefore, could only mean—and time was to prove him right—that

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and finally achieving national unity in a federation simplified and facilitated by the political similarity of its component units

It is by no means inconceivable that such a policy might have been adopted in the earlier phases of British expansion if all India had consisted of firmly established kingdoms or principalities. But it did not. It was littered with the shapeless and shifting debris of the Mogul Empire, and to clear it up the easiest and cleanest and often the only practicable course was downright annexation. The subsequent stability of British India was plainly the result of direct British rule, and in 1861 it would have seemed like undoing this work of consolidation if the Provinces as single units or in parts, were to be handed back to Indian rulers. With the lapse of time, moreover, since the dethronement of the old dynasties it would often have been difficult to determine who those Indian rulers should be.

Thus unless indeed Mill was thinking of it, the revival of monarchy in any part of British India seems never to have been contemplated, either then or afterwards, save only in one case.<sup>1</sup> In 1831 the Raja of Mysore was deposed, and for fifty years the State was administered by British officials, but in 1881 the adopted son of the old Raja was permitted to resume the government. Since the terms of the agreement were not dictated, like the earlier treaties, by the political exigencies of the moment, they conceded to the Paramount Power a markedly greater measure of control. One clause laid down that 'the Maharaja of Mysore shall at all times conform to such advice as the Governor General in Council may offer him with a view to the management of his finances, the settlement and collection of his revenues, the imposition of taxes the administration of justice' and so on.<sup>2</sup> This was strictly in accordance with the principles of Indirect Rule as it was to be practised later on in different circumstances in other parts of the British Empire, and it is an interesting fact that Mysore to-day is one of the most progressive and prosperous of all the Indian States.

It is idle to dwell on might-have-beens, but it is perhaps worth remarking that the course of constitutional development would have had a somewhat different complexion if the monarchical tradition could have been and had been retained in British India.

<sup>1</sup> Benares might be cited as a second case. In 1911 its Raja who had hitherto been regarded as a great landholder with administrative powers in his 'domains' was raised to the status of a chief. But the area involved was small and Benares cannot rank with Mysore.

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designed to obtain a more accurate register of opinion. Thirdly, the constituencies are almost always 'general', i.e. comprising all the voters in a certain geographical area irrespective of the differences between them, but in one or two cases they consist of voters belonging to different economic or cultural groups.<sup>1</sup>

4 The relations between the legislature and the executive also vary. Under the system known as parliamentary or cabinet government, first developed in England and afterwards adopted by some other European countries, the members of the government are also members of the legislature and are continuously responsible to it i.e. they depend for their retention of office from day to day on the support of a majority in the legislature, usually in its lower or more popular chamber. In Switzerland the members of the government are not members of the legislature, they are elected at the outset of a legislature's life and hold office till the end of it whatever changes of opinion may occur from time to time. In the United States of America the members of the government are chosen (subject to the Senate's approval) by the President who is separately elected by the people and, with his colleagues, remains quite separate from the legislature and, except in so far as his policy can be affected by legislation, is not controlled by it.

5 In the United States Britain and the British Dominions, the two party system was usually in operation till recent years, i.e. the Government and the Opposition were each supported by a single party. But except in the United States, Canada and New Zealand single party government has tended not only in wartime to be replaced by government by coalitions of two or more parties. In continental Europe a multi-party system has been usual. In pre-war France Governments were backed by a *bloc* of several groups.

6 Most of the systems of representative government are unitary i.e. whatever organs of local government may exist, they are all subordinate to one national legislature. But the United States Switzerland Canada and Australia have adopted the federal system i.e. authority is divided between the legislatures of the Provinces or States and the Central or National legislature, each legislature being independent in its own field. This is an extension of the principles of representative government, not a departure from them. The federal units may differ in character—they differ more in Switzerland and Canada than in the United States and Australia—but the difference is not great enough to

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the people were still completely illiterate. Their only interests in this world were their families and crops and cattle. They knew nothing about politics. The paraphernalia of a popular election would have merely bewildered them. Nor, it seemed, was there any weakening in those divisions of caste and creed which inhibited the growth of a consciousness of common citizenship even in a single town or district, still more in an all-embracing state. Thus, while the idea that Indians would learn in due course to 'govern and protect' themselves was never repudiated, the prospect of the 'proudest day' seemed steadily to recede. The reaction to the Mutiny tended to push it further beyond the horizon. By the 'eighties it had been comfortably tucked away at the back of the British mind, a mind which habitually concerns itself more with the practical needs of the moment than with speculations about the future. The longer, in fact, that the British Raj lasted, the bolder it seemed to contemplate its replacement by an Indian Raj. It was harder, say, for Ripon in 1884 than it had been for Lawrence in 1844.

That was not only due to the difficulties and doubts about Indian self-government. There were external factors also. The strategic argument for keeping a firm hold on the defence of India had gained in force with the revival of international rivalries in Europe. The harsh experience of our own day has taught public opinion that, as long as war is retained as an 'instrument of national policy', there is no major political issue which is not involved, directly or indirectly, in the hazardous complex of international relations; and British policy in India was no exception to this rule. From 1861 onwards it was necessarily affected by the advance of the Russian Empire to the frontier of Afghanistan. In the year in which, as will be seen, the first meeting of the Indian National Congress marked the birth of Indian nationalism, the 'Penjdeh incident' on the Indian frontier brought Britain and Russia to the brink of war. And no sooner had the fear of Russian expansion died away than a new potential menace to the security of India was presented by the startling rise of Japan. The idea that Britain should leave the defence of India in Indian hands would have seemed in those days quite fantastic.

The financial and commercial arguments for maintaining the stability of the British Raj were also steadily growing stronger. The total amount of British money invested in the public debt or in private enterprise in India was rising year by year. By 1900 the public debt was over £200 millions, most of it owed to British

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## The Birth of Indian Nationalism

### I. THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PROVINCES

WITH the final establishment of the British Raj the old days of fighting and intrigue, of shifting frontiers and changing rulers, had passed away. Thenceforward political boundaries might be modified for administrative or cultural reasons, but not by force of arms. Nor were any more civil wars of succession to be fought. India, in fact, had obtained a more stable framework of government than she had ever possessed before for any length of time. This was an immeasurable boon to the masses of Indian countryfolk, but it did not widen their outlook beyond the bounds of their innumerable villages. Their patriotism, if so it can be called, was still purely local. They were used to foreign rulers, and even the change from Indian to British rule meant little to them except that British rule was better. The ideas of nationalism, of self-government and nationhood, were quite beyond their understanding. But it was otherwise with educated Indians in the towns, a relatively small minority, but now rapidly growing in numbers and importance. On their minds the stability of the British Raj was having its effect. Not long after the Mutiny a new political consciousness, a new sense of civic allegiance, was beginning to make itself felt in accordance with the new framework of government. It was first apparent in the Provinces and then in British India as a whole.

The acquisition by the Provinces of a coherent and individual character was not in every case the doing of the British Raj. The Punjab under the Sikhs and Bengal under its Moslem rulers had been distinct 'countries', comparable with those of Europe. But most of the British Provinces had no such previous tradition. Their frontiers did not correspond with the historical or cultural divisions of the Indian peoples. They had been drawn to suit political or administrative convenience at the time of absorption into British India.

Bombay, for example, obtained only a part of Maharashtra in 1818, and only about one-fifth of its Hindu population are Marathas now. Then as now, large sections of them spoke Gujarati and Canarese, and Sindi too, till Sind was made a separate Province in 1936. And there were Moslem and other communal minorities,

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At a later period the demarcation of the Provinces was to be made substantially more 'natural' by the creation of new Provinces, mainly on a linguistic basis. The Biharis and Oriyas were to be separated from Bengal and Madras like the Sindis from Bombay. But already in the last decades of the nineteenth century the great territorial units had acquired a real character of their own from the mere fact that they were stable units of administration. A strong Provincial Government with its own powers in finance and legislation, a Provincial civil service recruited from the people of the Province, Provincial courts of justice, Provincial schools and colleges, and, in due course, universities—all this was bound to have a unifying effect, to foster among the educated classes a sense of the state, to inspire, even before the growth of self-government gave it new force and meaning, a Provincial patriotism. Time and circumstance and custom, steadily confirming the natural features of the Provincial framework and steadily wearing down its artificial features, were giving to the political organisation of vast and complex India a more definite and more solid shape. Out of the chaos and strife a group of 'countries' had emerged, and to Englishmen like John Bright it seemed that the political map of India might ultimately assume something like the international pattern of the map of Europe. Bright had always favoured the growth of Provincial patriotism. In 1858 he had urged in the House of Commons that British India should be split into five Presidencies or Provinces, wholly separate from each other and under separate control by the British Government. Restating this policy in 1877, he said:

You would teach the people of each of these Presidencies to consider themselves, as generations passed on, as the subjects and people of that State. And thus, if the time should come—and it will come, for I agree with Lord Lawrence that no man who examines the question can doubt that some time it must come—when the power of England, from some cause or other, is withdrawn from India, then each of these States would be able to sustain itself as a compact, as a self-governing community. You would have five or six great States there, as you have five or six great States in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE UNIFICATION OF INDIA

If Bright had studied the past of India or had been able to foresee the future of Europe, he could scarcely have desired that

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tradition strong enough to resist new doctrines from abroad. But the field of politics was relatively virgin soil. No other doctrine, Hindu or Moslem, had yet grown out of it than the old doctrine of autocracy by divine right. There was no political science in the modern sense. But in Europe this was the golden age of Liberalism and in Indian minds, especially those of young Indians, studying the political classics of English literature from Milton to Mill, the two main tenets of Liberalism—nationalism and democracy—were soon firmly planted. They took for gospel, without much consideration of what 'nation' meant, that nations should be free and, without much reflection on the long history of political evolution in Europe, that national governments should be popular governments. They gathered, also, both from their text books and from the opinions of their British teachers and friends that in both these matters Britain claimed to have taken the lead in the world. They discovered how British Liberalism had backed the cause of nations 'rightly struggling to be free'—in South America, in the Balkans, in Italy, in Ireland. And they found that Britain was not only the most powerful champion of popular government in the West, but had also evolved a particular form of it, which to its British practitioners at any rate, seemed the best of all possible forms. They learned, finally, that this particular British form of government, parliamentary responsible government, could be transplanted—that, in fact, since the morrow of the American Revolution, it had been gradually extended to the British self-governing Colonies overseas.

Thus, as time went on, a growing number of Indians became not only politically minded, but linked with one another by a common conception of India's political destiny. In the first place, India, they believed, was a nation *in posse*—it had only to realise its nationhood. Secondly, the nation would be entitled to its national freedom as soon as it was fitted to exercise it—and the best method of making it fit was the gradual introduction of British parliamentary government on the Colonial model.

### 3 THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Indian nationalism may be said to have taken formal shape when in 1885 seventy-two Indians from various parts of India attended the first Session of the Indian National Congress. It was a very different body then from what it is now. Its members were nationalists, but of the kind that came to be called Moderates or

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the first and second Sessions resolutions were carried asking for specific advances along the parliamentary road. At least half the members of the Legislative Councils should be elected, and they should be entitled to deal with the budget and to ask questions on all matters of administration within the limits of public safety.<sup>1</sup> Later on, as will be seen, the 'Colonial model' was formally adopted.

This programme might almost be described as 'pure Macaulayese'. Did it not portend that the dream of 1833 was coming true? Indians, having become instructed in European knowledge, were demanding European institutions. But, if the programme accorded with Macaulay, it did not accord with Mill. It ignored the difference between the 'conditions of government' in India and in Europe. It assumed that old-established political practices and habits of mind could be easily transplanted from British to Indian soil.

#### 4. THE MOSLEM RECOIL

In the course of his farewell speech in 1888, Dufferin, disturbed by the growing self-assurance of Congress demands, thought fit to describe its adherents as a 'microscopic minority' of the multitudinous Indian people. That was true enough at the time, but the congenital weakness of the new nationalism did not lie there. Time and again the fate of a nation has been decided, and often rightly decided, by a vigorous minority. The real weakness lay in the fact that the nationalist movement was not supported by all educated Indians: it was not the expression of a pan-Indian patriotism. As time went on, Congress leaders were to claim, increasingly and insistently, that the Congress spoke for the whole of India. *But this has never been true. In the first place the Congress has never represented the Indian States, nor has its representation of the minority communities in British India been ever more than partial.* The second of these weaknesses, as the sequel will show, has been much more serious than the first, and, though its implications may not have been fully realised at the outset, the fact that it existed was plain enough. The first Session of the Congress was overwhelmingly Hindu in composition. Of its seventy-two members only two were Moslems, a couple of lawyers from Bombay. At the second Session, held in the more Moslem north, there were 33 Moslem delegates out of 440. For a time the Moslem

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bringing about in Hindu India. Inevitably, therefore, the new political ideas meant less to them. Probably the average Hindu student at this time knew more about liberal doctrines and nationalist movements in Europe than most young Englishmen. Certainly the average Moslem student knew less.

It was the connexion between education and government that forced the Moslems to bestir themselves. When Hindu clerks were promoted to posts in which they could give orders, when even policemen were chosen because they were good at their books, it was clearly time for the Moslems to reconsider their attitude to the new education. That was the doctrine preached by the greatest Indian Moslem of those days, Sir Syed Ahmad. Belonging to a family of good position and repute in Mogul days, he had joined the lower ranks of the civil service in 1837 and had steadily risen till in 1878 he reached the highest post so far attained by an Indian, membership of the Governor-General's Legislative Council. His influence within his own community was naturally unrivalled and his greatest service to it was in the field of education. Defying orthodox hostility, he declared that modern learning was neither forbidden by the Koran nor dangerous to the faith it taught; and his final triumph was won when in 1877 he set beside the many mainly Hindu colleges now pursuing that modern learning all over India a Moslem college, one day to become the Moslem University of Aligarh.

The Moslem recoil from Congress nationalism was mainly Ahmad's doing. He was undeniably a patriot and by no means an unquestioning supporter of the British Raj. He had pointed out that the chief cause of the Mutiny was the lack of contact between Government and the governed and had spoken with bitter candour of the arrogant attitude of many Englishmen in India towards Indians.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it true that his hostility to the Congress was inspired mainly, if at all, by the fact that it presumed to criticise a system of government in which he now held such an exalted place. The mainspring of his policy was communal. He believed that the Congress programme spelt danger for his community, and he did his best to dissuade his fellow-Moslems from helping to bring about its execution.

The crux, of course, was the Congress's adherence to representative government in its British form. Ahmad knew, and told the Moslems, what that meant. In 1883 a bill for establishing local self-government in the Central Provinces was passed by the

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for never setting India free from British rule. For these reasons, Hindu politicians were inclined to minimise the minority problem or to argue it away. 'We should very much like to know', wrote the author of an official Congress publication in 1890, 'whether Great Britain herself is not divided into two sections, one of which is bitterly hostile to the other and desirous of opposing it on all occasions.'<sup>1</sup> It is curious that the weakness of that argument was not at once apparent. The Liberal and Conservative parties in Britain were certainly in bitter opposition; but in 1892 Gladstone became Prime Minister instead of Salisbury, and in 1895 Salisbury was back again in office, and so on. Could the Congress writer have overlooked the fact that the pendulum could not swing like that in India: that, as long as political parties were mainly communal, the Moslem minorities would always be minorities and never come into power?

The only effective answer which the Congress could have made to the Moslems' challenge was to convince them that it was in fact, as it professed to be, a non-communal organisation, that the ideal of a free Indian nation transcended communal divisions, and that in the campaign to achieve it all communities marched side by side on an equal footing. On such a hypothesis communal arithmetic lost its meaning. There would doubtless be majorities and minorities in the Congress movement as in all political movements, but they would have nothing to do with religion. Many Hindus, no doubt, sincerely held those views in 1885 as many of them do now, but then as now not all of them. And it so happened that the 'extremist' wing of the Congress, the growth of which will be recorded in the next section of this chapter, was, in the early days at any rate, undisguisedly communal. The first extremists were out-and-out Hindus. They represented the deep-rooted conservatism of Hinduism and its reaction against the West. They were associated with the 'back to the Vedas' school which glorified the Hindu past and preached a return to a purer faith, uncontaminated by contact with Western materialism. It was, mainly, in fact, a religious movement at the outset, and, as such, it was necessarily anti-Moslem. One of its champions, for example, founded a society which sought to inhibit Moslems from killing the sacred cow. And, when the movement developed its political side, there too, it was clear, the Moslems had no place. This was strikingly shown when B. G. Tilak, a Brahmin of Maharashtra, who headed the extremist movement in Western India, started a cult of Sivaji, the famous

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The other credit items in the balance sheet of the British Raj were, as recorded in an earlier chapter, being revalued at this time by all Indian nationalists, and mostly written down. But the extremists transferred them bodily to the debit side of the account. British rule, they said, had only unified India in form: in fact it had deepened its divisions. It had not promoted the economic advance of India: it had drained its national wealth away.

The doctrine that British rule was an unqualified and unscrupulous tyranny was first preached in western India by B. G. Tilak and then in Bengal by Bepin Chandra Pal and Arabinda Ghose. 'Direct action' resulted in both fields. In 1896 Tilak used the columns of his notorious *Kesari* (Lion) to foment the unrest provoked by the drastic measures taken by the Government to check the spread of an outbreak of bubonic plague in Bombay. 'Did Sivaji commit a sin in killing Afzal Khan or not?' he wrote. 'With benevolent intentions he murdered Afzal Khan for the good of others'.<sup>2</sup> A week afterwards the Plague Commissioner and another British officer were assassinated. In Bengal terrorism began about ten years later, stimulated by the unpopular partition of the Province in 1905, and associated with the worship of the Hindu goddess, Kali. In 1909 a blow was struck at long range. Sir Curzon Wyllie, a retired official, was murdered in London by a young pupil of V. D. Savarkar, himself a pupil of Tilak.<sup>3</sup>

The gravest feature of extremism, as its exponents are well aware, is that it starts a vicious circle. Confronted by a revolu-

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constitutional means by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit and developing and organising the intellectual, moral, economic, and industrial resources of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking at a gathering of students in 1909, Gokhale contrasted the old political doctrine with the new.

Our old public life was based on frank and loyal acceptance of British rule due to a recognition of the fact that it alone could secure to the country the peace and order which were necessary for slowly evolving a nation out of the heterogeneous elements of which India was composed and for ensuring to it a steady advance in different directions. The new teaching condemns all faith in the British Government as childish and all hope of real progress under it as rash.<sup>2</sup>

Young independent-minded Indians, he admitted, were naturally obsessed by two ideas. 'One is how to get rid of the foreigner, and the other is how soon to get rid of him. All else must appear to them comparatively of minor importance.' But the old doctrine was still the wiser doctrine.

We have to remember that British rule, in spite of its inevitable drawbacks as a foreign rule, has been on the whole a great instrument of progress for our people. Its continuance means the continuance of that peace and order which it alone can maintain in our country and with which our best interests, among them those of our growing nationality, are bound up.<sup>3</sup>

This attitude did not mean, of course, that the moderates were in complete agreement with British policy. Gokhale could be an outspoken critic of Government on occasion, and he pleaded earnestly and repeatedly that the pace of constitutional advance should be quickened. But the moderates' attitude did mean that there was no disagreement on the fundamental issue as to whether the freedom of India was to be won suddenly by force or gradually by law. Hence their discord with the British Government was not basic. The two policies were not so much out of tune as out of time.

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automatically, therefore, despite what Ripon had said, something akin to the English system was adopted. The new bodies were not only based on the representative principle—they were constituted to a large extent by the method of election. Many members of the Municipal Councils and Rural District Boards—in some cases a majority—were directly elected.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 THE INDIAN COUNCILS ACT, 1892

It seems strange that the introduction of election for the purposes of local government excited little public interest, since election was the only serious point of contention in the discussion, initiated a few years later, as to the development of the Central and Provincial Legislative Councils established in 1861. Partly because the experiment of inviting Indians to assist in the work of legislation had proved an unqualified success, partly to meet the demand for constitutional advance voiced by the new born Congress, Dufferin and his official advisers at the Centre made two proposals. (1) The Councils should again be enlarged so as to admit a higher proportion of non official members. Some of these should still be nominated but others—as many as two fifths in the Provincial Councils—should be elected some by direct election on a high property franchise, others by indirect election exercised by local government bodies and universities. (2) The restriction of the Provincial Councils' functions to purely legislative business should be withdrawn. It should be legitimate to discuss, but not to vote on the budget and matters of general administration.

These proposals were accepted by Salisbury's Government except with regard to election. They could not agree, said the Secretary of State (Cross), to 'a fundamental change of this description without much more positive evidence in its favour than was forthcoming'.<sup>2</sup> But Lansdowne, who succeeded Dufferin in 1888, continued to press for it, and Gladstone urged, with persuasive moderation, that 'this great and powerful engine of government' should begin to operate in India on however small a scale. The upshot was characteristic of British politics, first because it was a compromise and secondly because the method of convention was adopted instead of that of positive law. The Act did not mention election—it only empowered the Governor-General

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the new Indian quasi-elections were to be made by just such groups and by them alone. Nor did the representative character of the new Councils mean that they were to be instruments of representative government in the form it had acquired in Britain. In the masterly dispatch which he drafted at the outset of the discussions, Dufferin was careful to explain that the proposed reform of the Councils, while it promoted 'the liberalisation of their general character as political institutions', must not be interpreted as 'an approach . . . to English parliamentary government and an English constitution'. 'Such a conclusion would be very wide of the mark, and it would be wrong to leave either the India Office or the Indian public under so erroneous an impression.' The non-official members of the Councils would be able 'to exercise a very powerful and useful influence' over the conduct of the Executive, but not to control it. There would be no responsible or parliamentary government of the British kind. The Government would continue to be appointed by the Crown on the advice of the Secretary of State, i.e. it would be ultimately responsible to Parliament; and in order to discharge that responsibility it must be in a position to carry out its policy whichever way the voting in the Council might go. Nor would the leaders of a dissentient majority in a Council bear 'the heavy sense of responsibility' borne by a parliamentary Opposition, since they would not be able to take the place of the Government they criticised.<sup>1</sup>

The composition and powers of the new Councils accorded with this doctrine. They were now authorised to discuss the budget and ask questions on administration; but there was no intention of making it possible for a Provincial Government to be seriously obstructed, still less overridden, by a hostile majority in its Council. Apart from the reservation to the Governor of the right of veto, the Councils were to be so composed, within the numerical limits prescribed by the Act, that there would be more officials, obliged at need to vote for the Government, than non-officials, and with one exception that intention was fulfilled as long as the Act was in operation.<sup>2</sup> The position at the Centre was similarly safeguarded. In the event, ten members of the Governor-General's Council were officials, five were directly nominated, and four were quasi-elected.

The Councils, in fact, were still regarded as *durbars* rather than

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of 1909 was a practical attempt to control and canalise the now fast-flowing current of Indian nationalism. Morley agreed with the Conservative Governor-General,<sup>1</sup> Lord Minto, on the one hand that extremism should be firmly checked and on the other hand that a new move should be made to satisfy the moderates and ensure their continued co-operation with Government. It was decided, accordingly, (1) to recognise and legalise the principle of election for both the Central and Provincial Councils, (2) to enlarge them all once more,<sup>2</sup> and, while retaining an official majority at the Centre, to concede non official majorities—i.e. of nominated and elected members together—in the Provinces,<sup>3</sup> and (3) to authorise the Councils to discuss and to pass resolutions on any matter of public interest, including the Government's budget policy.

This was a natural advance on 1892, and it naturally stressed and intensified that point of difference which had already emerged between the operation of the representative principle in Britain and its application to India. It was still regarded as impracticable to create 'general' or territorial constituencies of the British type, and since many more seats were now to be filled by election, the group system of representation was expanded. By rules made under the Act, besides local government bodies and universities, chambers of commerce, landowners, and minority religious communities of which the most important were the Moslems and the Sikhs, were represented. These communal minorities were also given 'weightage', i.e. they obtained more seats than would have been allotted them on a purely numerical basis. This group-representation in itself, as has been noted, accorded with Indian 'conceptions' and 'conditions' rather than British, but the difference was aggravated by the concession to the Moslems, and to them alone, of 'separate electorates', i.e. the elections to the seats reserved for Moslems were to be made by Moslem voters only.

The request for 'separate electorates' as well as 'weightage' was presented to Minto by a Moslem deputation headed by the

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Government should declare its intention 'to confer self-government on India at an early date' and that in any post-war reconstruction of the imperial system India should be 'lifted from the position of a dependency to that of an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in seven short years, and particularly in the war years, Indian nationalism may be said to have come of age. In 1885 the prospect of a self-governing Indian nation had been shrouded in the mists of a distant future. In 1916 it seemed not only clearly visible, but almost within reach. The older nationalists had been hoping for the freedom of their children or their children's children—the younger ones were hoping now to live to be free themselves. But this great change in the outlook of Indian nationalism was not matched by any similar change in the facts of Indian life. The obstacles in the path towards self-government were not appreciably less in 1917 than in 1885. The vast majority of the people were still ignorant and apathetic. The caste-system still defied the principles of fellow-citizenship. Communal schism and the division between British and Indian India still questioned the reality of Indian nationhood. To all appearance all these obstacles were as formidable as ever until, at the very end of the period, one of them—and, as the subsequent course of events was to show, the most formidable—was faced and tackled and, at any rate for the time being, overcome. In 1916 the rising tide of nationalism carried the Hindu and Moslem leaders into the same camp.

Before the war Hindu-Moslem antagonism on the constitutional issue had been steadily increasing, and on two points in particular agreement seemed impossible. First, the Moslem League stubbornly upheld 'separate electorates': the Congress as stubbornly condemned them. Secondly, the Congress interpreted its goal of Colonial self-government as implying the adoption of the British parliamentary system: the League repudiated that objective and produced a counter-formula—'the attainment under the aegis of the British Crown of a system of self-government *suitable to India*'. On this both wings of the League, the right led by Mr. (later Sir) Muhammad Shafi and the left led by Mr. M. A. Jinnah, an eminent Bombay lawyer, were in accord. Yet, wide as the gulf seemed to be in 1914, in 1916 it was bridged. At the end of that year the leaders of the Congress and the League, meeting at Lucknow, came to an agreement as to the method of election to the Councils and the distribution of the seats, known thereafter as the

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Meanwhile public opinion in Britain was changing almost as fast as in India. Before the war it was generally supposed that a considerable time would elapse before an advance would be justified beyond the stage reached in 1909, and in 1912 the Liberal Secretary of State, Lord Crewe, frankly disavowed the idea of Dominion Status as the goal in India <sup>2</sup>. Yet in 1917 the British Government committed itself to a policy which not only involved another advance but logically led to Dominion Status. This rapid change, this 'new angle of vision' as it was called, was not mainly due to the growing strength of Indian nationalism. Like that growth itself, it was mainly due to the reactions of the war. From the outset India made a great contribution to the common war effort. She sent one million men to the battlefields. Large sums were voted by the Central Legislature to meet war expenditure, and the Princes and other wealthy Indians made generous gifts to the Government and to patriotic funds. After the United States, moreover, had come into the war and Tsarist Russia had dropped out of it, the Allies adopted the watchwords of 'national self-determination' and 'making the world safe for democracy', and these principles, though intended in the first instance to apply to Europe, might be taken to apply to Asia too. But the 'new vision' was not inspired only by a sense of obligation. The old tradition of Britain's championship of freedom had been revived and stimulated by the conflict with Prussian militarism, and, if the chief author of the new policy was a Liberal statesman, Mr Montagu, Lord Crewe's successor at the India Office, it was not a party question. The historic Announcement of 1917 was made by Mr Lloyd George's National Government which included such experienced and sober minded Conservatives as Lord Milner, Lord Curzon and Mr Balfour.

The essence of the Announcement lay in its opening sentence

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in the Provinces, the devolution of powers from the Centre should be extended and legalised.

2. The Provincial Legislative Councils should be enlarged. In all of them the majority of the members should be elected. The franchise should be widened so as to bring a substantial body of countryfolk into the political field.

3. A beginning of responsible government should be made in the Provinces. Since no one suggested that the Provincial Governments could be made forthwith responsible as a whole to the Legislatures, the field of government should be divided. Some 'subjects', finance and law and order in particular, should be 'reserved' to the control of the Governor-in-Council, i.e. the old official executive, responsible through the Centre to the Secretary of State and Parliament. Other 'subjects', such as education, agriculture, public health, local government, should be 'transferred' to the control of Ministers responsible to the Legislature, the Governor retaining the right to override the Legislature if he deemed it necessary. Responsible government would be 'progressively realised' by the transfer of further 'subjects' to Ministers as and when it should seem justified in the light of experience.

4. The Central Government should remain for the present responsible only to the Secretary of State and Parliament, but the Legislature should be reconstituted on a bicameral basis. The lower house, to be known as 'the Legislative Assembly of India' and intended to 'represent the interests of the entire country', should consist of at least 100 members, two-thirds of whom should be elected as far as possible directly. For purposes which he might deem necessary the Governor-General, like the Provincial Governors, would be empowered to 'certify' measures and carry them into law over the head of the Legislature.

5. These proposals would only refer to British India since Parliament had no authority to legislate for the Indian States.<sup>1</sup> Constitutional advance in the adjacent Provinces would be bound to affect opinion in the States—'hopes and aspirations may overleap frontier lines like sparks across a street'—but the treaties must be honoured and the Princes left to adjust their governments to modern ideas at their own pace and in their own way. Some day—and the authors of the *Report* evidently regarded it as a distant day—union of some kind between British and Indian India might

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It was not because the authors of the new policy minimised those obstacles. On the contrary, they described them frankly and faced them squarely. They admitted that the politically-minded intelligentsia, the only Indians who asked for constitutional advance, might number no more than some 5 per cent. of the population, and that the vast majority, the millions of illiterate countryfolk, knew nothing and cared nothing about politics. 'The immense masses of the people are poor, ignorant, and helpless far beyond the standards of Europe.'<sup>1</sup> They admitted, also, that the Hindu caste-system was a negation of democratic principles, and, linking it with communal division, they said outright that, as long as such sectional interests were paramount, 'any form of self-government to which India can attain must be limited and unreal at best'.<sup>2</sup> As to communal division, especially the Hindu-Moslem schism, it was, they admitted again, 'the difficulty that outweighed all others', and they hesitated to accept the Lucknow concordat as proof 'that religious dissensions between the great communities are over'. 'As long as the two communities entertain anything like their present view as to the separateness of their interests, we are bound to regard religious hostilities as still a very serious possibility.'<sup>3</sup> And the extent to which those interests were in fact regarded as separate was acknowledged when the authors of the *Report*—with even greater reluctance than Morley, since they were contemplating parliamentary government and he was not—acquiesced in the retention of separate electorates. 'The British Government is often accused of dividing men in order to govern them. . . . If it unnecessarily divides them at the very moment when it professes to start them on the road to governing themselves, it will find it difficult to meet the charge of being hypocritical or shortsighted.' But the maintenance of the electoral division was a necessity. It was not merely that the Moslems regarded it as their 'only adequate safeguard', that its abandon-

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the Empire goes all in one direction. As power is given to the people of a province or of a Dominion to manage their own local affairs, their attachment becomes the stronger to the Empire which comprehends them all in a common bond of union. The existence of national feeling or the love and pride in a national culture need not conflict with, and may indeed strengthen, the sense of membership in a wider commonwealth. The obstacles to a growth in India of this sense of partnership in the Empire are obvious enough. Differences of race, religion, past history, and civilisation have to be overcome. But the Empire which includes the French of Canada and the Dutch of South Africa—to go no further—cannot in any case be based on ties of race alone. It must depend on a common realisation of the ends for which the Empire exists, the maintenance of peace and order over wide spaces of territory, the maintenance of freedom and the development of the culture of each national entity of which the Empire is composed. These are aims which appeal to the imagination of India, and in proportion as self-government develops patriotism in India we may hope to see the growth of a conscious feeling of organic unity with the Empire as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

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doctrine of *Ahimsa*, the repudiation of force, was not only a matter of ethics or religion but also a political weapon which could be effectively employed against a civilised Government.<sup>1</sup> For some time he kept it sheathed. Not yet a complete pacifist, he did not denounce the war. On the contrary he upheld the cause of Britain and her allies against German militarism, he volunteered for ambulance work in France, and as late as the spring of 1918 he spoke at a meeting at Delhi called by Lord Chelmsford to stimulate a final effort on India's part to help in achieving victory. But soon after that his attitude altered. A committee, headed by Mr Justice Rowlatt, had been appointed to inquire into the 'terrorism' which was still lurking in certain areas, particularly Bengal. The publication of its report in July 1918 revealed the existence of a secret subversive agitation, marked by bomb outrages, murders and gang-robberies which had not been suppressed by means of the ordinary law, and on the Committee's recommendation an Act was passed in March 1919 equipping the Government with special powers for use in an emergency. Gandhi denounced this Act as proof that the British tradition of justice had been overmastered by the love of arbitrary power. He launched a campaign of passive resistance against the Act, not only in the towns but in the country districts, and it was soon apparent that in this small, frail, ascetic, subtle-minded evangelist Indian nationalism had obtained a most formidable champion. For, while Gandhi's revival of old Hindu doctrine appealed to Hindu intellectuals, his bearing and behaviour stirred one of the deepest chords in the Indian peasant's heart—reverence for a saint. But it was also evident that, while Gandhi could easily rouse an ignorant and excitable Indian mob to defy the law, he could not so easily impose on it the doctrine of *ahimsa*, and the turbulence and anti-British feeling he aroused was one of the causes of the outbreak in the Punjab which culminated in the tragedy at Amritsar. He confessed, indeed that his conduct at this time had been a 'Himalayan miscalculation',<sup>2</sup> but he was not deterred from launching in 1920 his first campaign of 'non-violent non co operation' or 'passive resistance' (*satyagraha*) designed to achieve *Swaraj* (self rule) within a year by the withdrawal of Indian patriots from all association

<sup>1</sup> In a statement to the press on the outbreak of war with Germany in 1939 a Congress leader in Madras observed: 'If Hitler had been here he would have shot Mahatma Gandhi and all of us by this time.' Mr S. Satyamurti, *Madras Mail* 25 September 1939.

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of parties possessing a majority in the Legislature. The Act worked best in Madras where the non-Brahmin Hindus united in the Justice Party to challenge the traditional supremacy of the Brahmins. In the other Provinces there were a multitude of groups, mostly communal and mostly based on local or personal rivalries, but no well-organised, well-disciplined parties. Loosely knit and ill-financed, the Liberals had neither the strength nor the coherence to provide their ministerial leaders with the backing they required. The Moslem League in those days was a relatively small body, mainly representing the wealthier land-owning class and lacking contact with the Moslem masses. The only party comparable with those of the democratic West, strong enough in numbers and in finance to build up a large-scale political organisation and gradually to extend it all over British India—the only party, moreover, which was all-Indian in the sense that it contained members of all communities in its ranks—was the non-co operating Congress. Hence Ministers were not steadily supported by steady party majorities, and were thus impelled more and more to rely on the votes of the official representatives or the 'reserved' side of the administration. So the main object of the dual system was frustrated (The Government came to be regarded as one Government, Ministers as 'Government men' rather than responsible popular leaders, and the majority in the Legislature, more or less as in the days before 1919 as a permanent Opposition).

More sinister and more discouraging to the 'faith' of 1919 was the growth of communal strife. Its most alarming feature had always been the intermittent outbreaks of rioting and bloodshed usually associated with the celebration of Hindu or Moslem religious ceremonies but often arising from some quite trivial accident, and the grave disorders provoked in 1917 in part of Bihar by a Hindu attempt to terrorise the Moslem peasantry into ceasing to kill cows seemed to show that the Lucknow Pact did not extend to the rank and file of the two communities. Between the political leaders, however, the *entente* continued, and it was greatly strengthened when in 1920 Gandhi associated the Congress with the Moslem 'Khilafat movement', seizing, as he put it, such an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Moslems as 'will not occur for another hundred years'.<sup>1</sup> But in 1921 the Khilafat movement collapsed. It had been aimed against the British Government's post-war policy towards the defeated Turkish Empire, and the ground was cut

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carrying many valuable bills, and between 1921 and 1935 the Governors General felt themselves obliged only six times to override the Assembly by 'certifying' measures which it had rejected. The debates, though sometimes heated, were orderly. Business was smoothly conducted in accordance with British parliamentary technique. The proceedings were well reported in the press and attracted more public attention than those of the Provincial Legislatures. More important than anything else, it seemed as if within the Assembly walls, whatever might happen outside them, the forces making for nationhood were cutting across the communal schism. Mr Jinnah and the more radical Moslems were often in the same lobby as the Hindu nationalists.

The Chamber of Princes, similarly, worked as it was meant to work. The regular gathering of all the leading rulers of Indian India or their representatives and their discussion of matters of common interest were evidently helping to break down the artificial isolation hitherto imposed on the States. The idea, moreover, that the two bodies might some day somehow be combined in one great national Parliament for the whole of India was gathering weight. It became more and more possible to imagine that a federal union of some sort might ultimately be brought about.

### 3 ANTICIPATIONS OF NATIONHOOD

There was one aspect of British policy between 1919 and 1935 which might have been regarded as confirming the sincerity of the British desire that India should realise her nationhood. A number of things were done in anticipation, so to speak, of India's attainment of full national status.

Measures were taken, in the first place, to equip India with the national military and civil services she would one day need. The Indian Army had been created as an instrument of the British Government, and in 1919 it contained no fully commissioned Indian officers. In 1923 a scheme was launched for building up a number of units entirely officered by Indians. In 1931 this was expanded to the equivalent of one division and one cavalry brigade. The number of places reserved for training Indian officers at Sandhurst was doubled in 1927, and an Indian Sandhurst was opened at Dehra Dun in 1934. The process of 'Indianising' the civil services was similarly speeded up. As has been pointed out in an earlier chapter,<sup>1</sup> the vast majority of officials in India had

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But the most striking manifestation of the new status accorded to India was the so-called 'Fiscal Convention'. The Parliamentary Committee of 1919, representing both Houses and all parties, had declared that, 'whatever be the right fiscal policy for India, it is quite clear that she should have the same liberty to consider her interests as Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa'.<sup>1</sup> It was accordingly decided that, if the Central Indian Government and Legislature were agreed on their fiscal policy, the Secretary of State would not exercise his overriding power on behalf of British interests. The upshot was the establishment of an Indian Tariff Board and the framing of a tariff which, in the teeth of strong protests from British manufacturers, imposed substantial duties on a number of British imports. On cotton goods the rate rose to 20 per cent. with direct and painful effect on the industry in Lancashire. Nor was this offset by any increase in the total volume of British trade with India. On the contrary the share of India's trade obtained by Britain had fallen by 1935 to less than 40 per cent., while the share obtained by foreign countries had risen to over 50 per cent.

Thus the traditional British method of constitutional advance, by establishing usages and conventions without changing the law—the method which had been applied to the Dominions before the ultimate legal change in 1931—was applied to India also. Just as the Dominions had exercised *de facto* the powers of full self-government long before their legislative autonomy was recognised *de jure* by the Statute of Westminster, so India was now obtaining *de facto* some of the attributes of Dominion Status while still *de jure* subordinate to Britain. Congress spokesmen, however, true to their new doctrine of British perfidy, brushed all these developments aside as mere pretences intended to disguise the hard truth that Britain did not mean to loosen her imperial grip on India; and for that reason, if for no other, it was unfortunate that the British Government hesitated for several years to declare outright that Dominion Status was now in fact the goal of British policy in India. It was not till 1929 that Lord Irwin was authorised to declare that 'the natural issue of India's constitutional progress' as contemplated in the Announcement of 1917 was 'the attainment of Dominion Status'.

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As to foreign policy it declared that a free India would deal with it, like the Dominions, in association with the other members of the Commonwealth

The treatment of the problem of the States was somewhat high-handed. Their Rulers' right to choose their own path was not questioned, but they were plainly told that, if a federal constitution were adopted, their adherence to it would only be welcome, or indeed possible, if their systems of government were modified. Nor should their non-adherence be allowed to obstruct the attainment of Dominion Status by the rest of India. The new responsible Government of British India would take over from the British Government its existing rights and obligations towards the States. This brusque suggestion was accompanied by a sharp warning. No attempt must be made 'to convert the Indian States into an Indian Ulster', and it must be recognised that their peoples would not for ever submit to autocratic government, nor the people of British India for ever refrain from making common cause with them.

It was the other major problem of Indian unity, the Hindu-Moslem schism, which, as their terms of reference had forecast, occupied most of the Committee's time and was treated in most detail, and in view of subsequent attempts to minimise its gravity it stands to the Committee's credit that they faced it firmly and made a constructive effort to solve it. While the conviction was expressed that, once India had been freed from foreign control, communal dissensions would be overlaid by a new social and economic pattern of politics, it was admitted that at present they 'cast their shadow over all political work' and that some settlement of the Hindu-Moslem question at any rate must be written into the new constitution. On this issue the Nehru Report broke away from the Lucknow Pact. It reverted to the earlier Hindu repudiation of separate electorates. Going further, it recommended the abolition even of reserved seats in Provinces in which the Moslems were in a majority and of 'weightage' in those in which they were in a minority. Moslems, it was implied, must be content with the security afforded them by the principle of Provincial autonomy. If, as was recommended, the North-West Frontier Province were endowed with the same full measure of Provincial self-government as the rest and if Sind were separated from Bombay, there would be four Provinces in which the Moslems, being a majority, would be able to protect themselves.

From the Moslem standpoint the force of this argument—on which was presently to be based the so-called 'balance' doctrine,

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and left wings, the latter still led by Mr Jinnah, were united in opposition to it and in repudiation of the Moslems who had signed it. On January 1 1929, an All India Moslem Conference adopted a full-scale manifesto of Moslem claims of which the most important were that the future constitution must be federal with the maximum of autonomy and the 'residual powers' vested in the Provinces, that separate electorates and 'weightage' must be retained, and that Moslems must have their due share in the Central and Provincial Cabinets.

Thus at the outset of the long inquiry the main issues in the conflict of Indian opinion stood out clearly. They may be tabulated as follows

1 The majority of the Congress held that a free India should break away from the British Commonwealth. Most other Indians were satisfied with the prospect of Dominion Status.

2 As regards the ultimate union of British and Indian India, the Princes held that this could only be brought about by their own free choice and that it did not necessitate the abolition of autocracy in the domestic affairs of the States. The Congress held that the unity of India required responsible government in the States and that it should be promoted by popular agitation.

3 For British India most Hindus contemplated a national government which, while conceding a measure of Provincial autonomy, would be as unitary as possible. The Moslems, backed (as will be seen) by the other minorities, insisted on a federation, and a loose federation in which the Provinces would have the maximum of autonomy.

4 All parties apparently desired or at least acquiesced in the retention of the British parliamentary system both in the Provinces and at the Centre. But Hindu opinion adhered more closely to the British model than Moslem opinion. The Hindus accepted communal representation at least in some of the Legislatures but rejected separate electorates and 'weightage'. The Moslems insisted on retaining both, and also claimed that communal representation should be extended to the Executive.

## 2 THE SIMON REPORT

Partly because the Simon Commission was created by Parliament to advise Parliament and partly because it would be difficult to include representatives of all Indian parties in it without making it unmanageably large, its seven members were chosen from the

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prevented British institutions from working in India as they worked in Britain. Communal antagonism in particular had not diminished; it had steadily increased. Apart from the non-co-operating Congress, political parties, with scarcely an exception, were communal parties. But, recognising that ten years was a short time and that the failure to operate the Act of 1919 in accordance with its authors' hopes had been partly due to the weaknesses of dyarchy, the Simon Report did not recommend that the parliamentary system should be abandoned in the Provinces and some other form of responsible government adopted. On the contrary it recommended that the gradual process of extending the parliamentary system should now be completed at one stroke. All departments, including finance and law and order, should now be 'transferred'. There should be a single Provincial Ministry, responsible for all Provincial affairs to the Legislature, and only checked by powers entrusted to the Governor—'safeguards' they were soon to be called—to override his Ministers on certain specified matters. As to the Legislatures, the most glaring departure from British practice, communal representation, aggravated by separate electorates, was denounced as such in the Simon Report no less frankly than in its predecessor, but for the same reason it was accepted as unavoidable for the present. 'No third party, however friendly and disinterested, can do what the two communities might co-operate in doing for themselves by mutual agreement'.<sup>1</sup> The Simon Commission seem, however, to have recognised for the first time that a non-British kind of Legislature logically implied a non-British kind of Executive, that the communal complexion of the one ought to be reflected in the other, or in other words that the Ministry ought always to be a Coalition Ministry in which all the major communities would be represented. But the Commission did not propose that such Coalitions should be made statutory, on the lines, for example, of the Swiss Constitution. They expressed the belief that they would be the almost automatic outcome of the communal composition of the Legislatures. 'In some Provinces we conceive that a reasonably stable Ministry is hardly possible without the inclusion of Ministers from the minority groups. In others prudence would dictate the adoption of a similar course'.<sup>2</sup> Yet, while acquiescing in the continuance of the parliamentary system, modified by communalism, the Commission clearly betrayed their conviction that it was not the best possible system for India. In the same sort of language which

<sup>1</sup> *Simon Report*, II 41

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

prevented British institutions from working in India as they worked in Britain. Communal antagonism in particular had not diminished: it had steadily increased. Apart from the non-co-operating Congress, political parties, with scarcely an exception, were communal parties. But, recognising that ten years was a short time and that the failure to operate the Act of 1919 in accordance with its authors' hopes had been partly due to the weaknesses of dyarchy, the Simon Report did not recommend that the parliamentary system should be abandoned in the Provinces and some other form of responsible government adopted. On the contrary it recommended that the gradual process of extending the parliamentary system should now be completed at one stroke. All departments, including finance and law and order, should now be 'transferred'. There should be a single Provincial Ministry, responsible for all Provincial affairs to the Legislature, and only checked by powers entrusted to the Governor—'safeguards' they were soon to be called—to override his Ministers on certain specified matters. As to the Legislatures, the most glaring departure from British practice, communal representation, aggravated by separate electorates, was denounced as such in the Simon Report no less frankly than in its predecessor, but for the same reason it was accepted as unavoidable for the present. 'No third party, however friendly and disinterested, can do what the two communities might co-operate in doing for themselves by mutual agreement'.<sup>1</sup> The Simon Commission seem, however, to have recognised for the first time that a non-British kind of Legislature logically implied a non-British kind of Executive, that the communal complexion of the one ought to be reflected in the other, or in other words that the Ministry ought always to be a Coalition Ministry in which all the major communities would be represented. But the Commission did not propose that such Coalitions should be made statutory, on the lines, for example, of the Swiss Constitution. They expressed the belief that they would be the almost automatic outcome of the communal composition of the Legislatures. 'In some Provinces we conceive that a reasonably stable Ministry is hardly possible without the inclusion of Ministers from the main minority groups. In others prudence would dictate the adoption of a similar course'.<sup>2</sup> Yet, while acquiescing in the continuance of the parliamentary system, modified by communalism, the Commission clearly betrayed their conviction that it was not the best possible system for India. In the same sort of language which

<sup>1</sup> *Simon Report*, II, 41

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British parliamentary system could not be reproduced at the Federal Centre 'The British model is not the only form of responsible government. It is possible to conceive of various methods whereby the Executive will become effectively responsible to the will of the Indian people. But it is too soon to say with certainty which line of advance will be adopted' <sup>1</sup>

As to the inclusion of the States in a Federation of all India, the Report was as cautious as its predecessor. It only recommended a consultative Council of Greater India representing both its sections. Other steps towards unity, it said, were 'as yet too distant and too dim to be described' <sup>2</sup>

The realism of the Simon Report can be better appreciated now than it was then. Its doctrine received little backing at the time of its publication. None of the Indian Committees which had worked alongside the Simon Commission produced unanimous Reports, but their majorities, broadly speaking, agreed with the Commission's opinion as to Provincial self government but differed from it as to the Centre, where, it was urged, an instalment of responsible government or dyarchy should be introduced forthwith. A similar reaction was manifest in the long and important dispatch drafted by the Governor-General (Lord Irwin) and his colleagues in the Central Executive Council. The gist of it was 'Back to the Montagu Chelmsford policy'. Federation was 'still a distant ideal', and it would be unwise so far to encourage Provincialism as to deprive the Centre of the strength which in an India exposed to the risks of external attack and internal dissension it so plainly needed <sup>3</sup>. To 'provincialise' the Central Legislature, moreover, would prematurely put a stop to an experiment which had so far proved successful. A directly elected unitary parliament was intended to appeal, and it had appealed, to Indian sentiment and it had thereby helped to foster the growing sense of nationhood. Nor was there good reason to abandon the British model at the Centre. 'We must look eventually to the emergence of a unitary responsible government' <sup>4</sup>. Meantime, while formal dyarchy was undesirable, a convention might be established that an increasing quota of the Executive Council should be chosen from among the party leaders in the Assembly and that the Council as a whole should be generally 'responsive' to their views except in such matters as foreign policy and defence <sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Simon Report*, II 145-6

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 202-206

<sup>3</sup> *Government of India's Dispatch (1930)* Cmd 3700 12-13, 190

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a plain-speaking adventurous politician, who had been Mr Gandhi's close ally in the days of the Khilafat movement, made a vigorous attack on Congress policy from the presidential chair 'We refuse to join Mr Gandhi', he said, 'because his movement is not a movement for the complete independence of India but for making the seventy millions of Indian Mussulmans dependents of the Hindu Mahasabha',<sup>1</sup> an association which had been founded in 1928 as a religious organisation for the conservation and purification of Hinduism, but which had recently begun to assume a political and markedly anti-Moslem complexion

Meanwhile the British Government was carrying out its plan for a Round Table Conference in London. Its first Session opened in December 1930. Of its 89 members, 57 represented the various parties in British India—the Hindu Liberals, the Moslems, the Depressed Classes, the Sikhs and so forth, all the important parties, in fact, except the Congress. There were sixteen delegates from Indian India, including some of the leading Princes. Britain was represented by sixteen members of Parliament, drawn from all three parties, and led by Mr Ramsay MacDonald, the head of the Labour Government of the day.

That the Conference would adopt the Simon Commission's recommendation of full responsible government in the Provinces was a foregone conclusion. It was to the national aspect of the constitutional question that interest was mainly directed, and as to that it was made clear at the very outset that the Indian delegates rejected the Commission's negative attitude towards an advance at the Centre. Princes and politicians alike, they voiced in chorus 'the claim of the East'. All of them agreed with the Maharaja of Bikaner when he said that 'the passion for an equal status in the eyes of the world' was the dominant force amongst all thinking Indians to-day.<sup>2</sup> They all agreed, moreover, that that passion would be satisfied by Dominion Status, whatever the Congress might say. 'If you give India Dominion Status to-day', said Mr Jayakar, a leftward Liberal, 'the cry of independence will die of itself'.<sup>3</sup> But this implied that the ideal of an Indian Federation, which the Simon Report had left in the clouds, could suddenly be brought to solid ground: it implied a union of British and Indian India, and it implied the withdrawal of all British control. To the general surprise the representatives of Indian India accepted the

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advanced by Dr Ambedkar on behalf of the Depressed Classes that they should be represented separately from the Hindu community at large

At the close of the Session this communal dispute seemed to be the only important question that could not be settled by compromise and consent. All the other sub-committees—on Federal Structure, on the Provincial Constitution, on the Franchise, on the Services and so forth—had agreed in principle, if not in detail, and the Prime Minister set the official seal on this general agreement when he announced the British Government's acceptance of the Federal plan, responsible government to be complete in the Provinces and qualified at the Centre by the reservation of certain subjects during a period of transition. As to the communal question, the new constitution, he said, must start 'with the goodwill and confidence of all the communities concerned', and it was their duty 'to come to an agreement among themselves'.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the communal deadlock the first Session of the Conference was thought to have proved a notable success. But there was admittedly one great flaw in it. The strongest Indian party, the party which most appealed to Indian youth, the party without whose co-operation no new constitution could work smoothly, had had no part in the proceedings. An earnest attempt was therefore made to induce the Congress to attend the second Session. In the spring of 1931 Lord Irwin, after close personal discussion with Mr Gandhi, concluded with him the 'Irwin Gandhi Pact', which provided for the release of 'political prisoners' on the one hand and for the suspension of the 'civil disobedience' movement on the other. It was part of the understanding that the Congress would no longer boycott the Conference, and, when the second Session opened in September, Mr Gandhi and a number of other Congressmen were present. Those others, however, attended only as individuals. Mr Gandhi was the sole official spokesman of the party, and the gist of the text he was to speak to had been settled by a resolution of the Working Committee,<sup>2</sup> which, it may be supposed, he had himself taken a hand in drafting. It declared that the new constitution must 'give the nation control' over all its affairs, including foreign policy and defence, and acknowledge its right to secede at will from the British Commonwealth. The Congress, in fact, as was to be expected, did not propose to say ditto to what had been more or less agreed on in its absence. It was prepared to acquiesce in Dominion Status, but only if it was given in full and at once.

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If agreement was not to be expected on the main issue, it was hoped that Mr. Gandhi might help to bring about some sort of compromise on the communal question. But his efforts, whole-hearted though they were, proved fruitless. At one stage he procured the adjournment of the Minorities sub-committee for a week during which he convened and presided over a series of informal meetings; but at the end of it he repeated 'with deep sorrow and deeper humiliation' his 'utter failure to secure an agreed solution of the communal question'.<sup>1</sup> He urged, however, that the work of constitution-making should not be held up, since a communal settlement might be reached by a judicial or arbitral process after the constitution had been completed. At this suggestion the attitude of the minorities hardened. Taking counsel together, they issued a joint statement that in the framing of the constitution their claims, with separate electorates at the head, must stand as a connected whole.<sup>2</sup>

It may be said, in sum, that, while Mr. Gandhi's personal relations with other members of the Conference and with the British public were of the friendliest, his participations in the discussions were of little practical value. If anything, he widened the rifts. Nor, in his absence from India, had the truce been maintained. A 'no-rent' campaign had been set on foot by the Congress in the United Provinces. A militant Moslem organisation, the 'Red Shirts', had been started in the North-West Frontier Province, and had made common cause with the Congress in defiance of the British Raj. There had been more terrorist murders in Bengal. On Mr. Gandhi's return to India at the end of 1931, the 'civil disobedience' movement was resumed, and early in 1932 Mr. Gandhi and other Congress leaders were again arrested.

Against this background of revolt the Conference steadily completed its work. In the course of 1932 Committees on the Franchise, on Federal Finance and on the States visited India and drafted their reports. In August, convinced after further discussion that there was no other way of resolving the deadlock, Mr. MacDonald announced that the British Government had adopted a provisional scheme for communal representation, afterwards known as the 'Communal Award'. It was based on the Lucknow

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mission or the third. The 'faith' of 1917-19 had evidently survived the scepticism of the Simon Report.

The mood of the Conference was not quite so sanguine at its end as at its opening stages. The main structure stood, but the stability of its foundations seemed uncertain. The Princes' initial ardour for a Federation of all India had lost its edge, and British India itself was still divided. The communal breach had only been bridged by the unilateral decision of the British Government, and the breach between the Congress and all the other parties concerned had widened. Nevertheless the Conference had done a great work. It had faced the difficulties of making India a free nation more fully and frankly than they had ever been faced before and it had resulted in a wide measure of agreement or at least acquiescence as to how they should be overcome.

#### 4 THE ACT OF 1935

The last stage of the long inquiry was parliamentary. In the spring of 1933 the proposals adopted by the British Government in the light of the Conference were submitted to a Joint Select Committee of both Houses with Lord Linnithgow in the chair. The strongest body of this kind ever set up, it made itself still stronger by inviting the leading Indian members of the Conference to come back and share in its deliberations. After sitting for eighteen months and examining a multitude of witnesses, it reported broadly in favour of the Government's proposals, and at the end of 1934 a bill embodying its recommendations was introduced. It was tenaciously resisted at each stage by the right-wing Conservatives led by Mr. Churchill in the Commons and Lord Salisbury in the Lords. On the crucial second reading it was carried by 404 votes to 133 in the Commons and by 236 to 55 in the Lords. On 4 August 1935 it received the Royal assent.

The content of the Act was twofold: it established a 'Federation of India' and it provided new constitutions for the Provinces of British India. Over the latter Parliament possessed full authority, and the Provincial part of the Act came into force, as prescribed, on 1 April 1937 and is operating now. But Parliament could not legislate for Indian India, and it was therefore provided that the Federal part of the Act should come into force only when a specific number of States had acceded to it. No State has yet acceded. Thus, while the Provinces have been working the new

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British India and the States were to be represented roughly in the proportion of two to one. The representatives of British India in the upper house were to be directly elected on a population basis,<sup>1</sup> those in the lower house were to be indirectly elected by the Provincial Legislatures, but also on a population basis. The representatives of the States in both houses were to be appointed by their rulers. Communal representation was to be retained on the same lines as in the Provinces.

2 Lists were appended to the Act of those matters in which the Federal and Provincial Legislatures would have sole or concurrent authority. 'Residual powers' were to be allotted, as occasion arose, by the Governor-General at his discretion—a compromise between the unitary and federal schools of thought.

3 Dyarchy, abandoned in the Provinces, was to be introduced at the Centre. All departments, except defence and foreign affairs,<sup>2</sup> were to be in charge of Ministers, responsible only to the Legislature, and the Governor-General was to be instructed to accept their advice with similar 'safeguards' to those prescribed in the Provinces. For assisting him in the control of foreign affairs and defence the Governor-General was to appoint 'Counsellors' who might or might not be members of the Legislature and would be responsible only to him.

4 As to finance, such items as the salaries of the Governor-General, Ministers, and Judges and the cost of the 'reserved' departments would be made, like the corresponding items in the Provinces, a first charge on the revenue and withdrawn from the vote of the Legislature. Currency was to be controlled by the Reserve Bank (established under a separate Act in 1934).

Two points may be noted. (1) The Federation was to be of the closer rather than the looser type. In particular the representation in both houses of the Federal Legislature was to be based on population and not, as in all other Federations, on the equal representation of the federating units in one house. To that extent Hindu 'unitarianism' had prevailed. (2) It was assumed that while the composition of the Federal Government would in practice be affected by its federal character as in other Federations the British parliamentary system would otherwise operate at the Centre as in the Provinces.

<sup>1</sup> Six of the 156 seats were reserved for nomination by the Governor-General.

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Constituent Assembly elected on a basis of adult suffrage or as near it as possible', and, if necessary, by separate electorates <sup>1</sup> Whatever the practical possibilities might be, this proposal accorded in theory with Dominion precedent. The Canadians, Australians and South Africans had drafted their own national constitutions in constituent conferences or conventions.

The Congress' rejection of the Act marked the culminating point in the policy of non co operation it had maintained since 1920 and to foreign observers, acquainted only with the public speeches and writings of Congressmen, it may well have seemed not only a natural decision but one which any genuine Indian patriot was bound to make. For Congress propaganda ignored what the Act gave, and fastened on what it withheld. Every check and restriction, every reservation and safeguard, was listed, and in the light of this formidable array the Act was held up not only as a mockery of self government but as a deliberate mockery. The restrictions not the liberties, it was argued, were the essence of the Act, and by their rigorous enforcement the British Government intended to maintain its hold on India.

This was a misconstruction, for it overlooked the fact that British constitutional practice is based more on usage and convention than on law. A striking illustration of this familiar principle had recently been afforded, as it happened in the Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931, whereby Dominion Status had been finally attested. The Declaration affirmed that, without any change in law, the Dominions had in fact acquired an equal status with Britain: they had for some time past been dealing with all their own affairs, including foreign policy. The Statute, similarly, in surrendering the British Parliament's legal right to legislate for the Dominions without their assent, was only a confirmation of what had come about by usage and convention: there had been no such overriding legislation for over half a century. Thus the British Parliament was merely giving away *de jure* a power it had long ceased to possess *de facto*. The moral of this applied directly to the Act of 1935. The reservations and safeguards were certainly intended to be real, and all Indian opinion outside the Congress had agreed that something of the sort was needed during the period of transition to full Dominion Status. But to the British mind the liberties conceded by the Act were of greater practical moment than the restrictions it retained for the simple reason that, if the liberties were well used, the restrictions,

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Constituent Assembly elected on a basis of adult suffrage or as near it as possible', and, if necessary, by separate electorates.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the practical possibilities might be, this proposal accorded in theory with Dominion precedent. The Canadians, Australians and South Africans had drafted their own national constitutions in constituent conferences or conventions.

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This was a misconstruction, for it overlooked the fact that British constitutional practice is based more on usage and convention than on law. A striking illustration of this familiar principle had recently been afforded, as it happened in the Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931, whereby Dominion Status had been finally attested. The Declaration affirmed that, without any change in law, the Dominions had in fact acquired an equal status with Britain: they had for some time past been dealing with all their own affairs, including foreign policy. The Statute, similarly, in surrendering the British Parliament's legal right to legislate for the Dominions without their assent, was only a confirmation of what had come about by usage and convention: there had been no such overriding legislation for over half a century. Thus the British Parliament was merely giving away *de jure* a power it had long ceased to possess *de facto*. The moral of this applied directly to the Act of 1935. The reservations and safeguards were certainly intended to be real, and all Indian opinion outside the Congress had agreed that something of the sort was needed during the period of transition to full Dominion Status. But to the British mind the liberties conceded by the Act were of greater practical moment than the restrictions it retained for the simple reason that, if the liberties were well used, the restriction

<sup>1</sup> *Congress in Evolution*, p. 30



dream of a century back, was based on representative government it could only be sustained by the votes of the Indian people, and, as was soon to be made manifest, the Congress could command too many of those votes to allow the constitution to work, except in a limited area and to a limited extent, without its co operation. In the event those two conditions were not realised. If they had been, and if in consequence the whole of the Act had come into force by general consent before the outbreak of the war in 1939, the whole complexion of the Indian problem might conceivably have been changed. Not only the representatives of the Provinces and the States but also the leaders of the great communities might have quickly acquired a new consciousness of national unity through working side by side in the nation's service—all the more quickly, perhaps, because at the outset the neutral British arbiter was still there, ready to assist in compromise and conciliation and with the 'safeguards' at his hand if in the last resort they should be needed. And, if at the Centre as well as in the Provinces the constitution of 1935 could thus have made an auspicious start, it seems not possible merely, but probable, that the process of advance by convention would have been stimulated by the impact of war and that by now a united India would have attained *de facto* Dominion Status and with it her national independence.

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Government would agree to their adherence. By then, as will be seen, the old division between British and Indian India had widened again, and it seemed as if the prospect of Federation had become almost as distant as it had been before the Round Table Conference.

Meantime the constitution of 1919 was still functioning. In Provincial politics there was no important development: it was a period of waiting for the end of dyarchy and the coming of full responsible government, and public interest was mainly concentrated on the Centre. Mr Gandhi and Pandit J. L. Nehru had been released in 1933, and the 'civil disobedience' movement had been *finally suspended in 1934*. *In the course of that year Mr Gandhi* decided to resign from the Congress and devote himself to working for the uplift of the Depressed Classes and the encouragement of village industries, and this may have made it easier for the Congress to modify its policy of non-cooperation. It was decided by a majority that the Congress should not boycott the forthcoming elections to the Central Assembly, but should try to win as many seats as possible in order to oppose and obstruct the Government. The results revealed the Congress' electoral strength. The composition of the Assembly of 1935 was as follows: Congress 44, Nationalists (a section of Congressmen, mainly members of the Hindu Mahasabha) 11, Independents (all Moslems but 3) 22, Europeans (representing the resident British community) 11. There were 26 officials and 13 nominated non-officials. The Liberals it will be noticed had been virtually eliminated.

This distribution of seats meant that the Government was bound to be defeated if the Moslem Independents voted with the Congress, and it was soon evident that Mr Jinnah, who had again become President of the Moslem League in 1934, was prepared to revive the *entente* of the Lucknow Pact period in the common cause of nationalism. On the constitutional issue he opposed the rejection of the Act as a whole, and the Congress motion to that effect was lost by 72 votes to 61. But he secured the backing of the Congress for three resolutions of his own, the first acquiescing in the 'Communal Award' pending an alternative settlement by the communities themselves, the second criticising the Provincial part of the Act but not condemning it outright, the third denouncing the Federal part as 'fundamentally bad and totally unacceptable' and demanding the prompt establishment of full responsible government in a federated British India. This alliance on constitutional questions was more or less consistently maintained on

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If war comes or other great crisis, India's attitude will make a difference. We hold the keys of success in our hands if we but turn them rightly <sup>2</sup>

Meantime, said the Pandit, the Act of 1935, 'a new charter of slavery', must be rejected root and branch. Congressmen should certainly contest the forthcoming Provincial elections but they should on no account take part in any Provincial Government. 'It would be a fatal error for the Congress to accept office. That would inevitably involve co operation with British imperialism' <sup>3</sup> But on this point the Pandit did not carry all his colleagues with him. Several leading Congressmen wanted to get control of the Provincial administration if they could, partly because they believed that it would help them to get control of the Centre later on, partly because office would enable them to introduce at once the schemes of social betterment which had long been associated in Congress propaganda with the cause of national freedom. Thus the Congress election manifesto, while it accepted Pandit Nehru's view that the purpose of entering the Provincial Legislatures was 'not to co operate in any way with the Act but to combat it and seek the end of it', postponed a decision on the question of accepting office till after the elections, and it contained a full dress programme of social reform, especially in the agrarian field, which plainly could only be put into effect if office were accepted. On the communal issue the manifesto condemned the Communal Award as inconsistent with democratic principles and disruptive of Indian unity, but it confessed that 'a satisfactory solution of the communal question can come only through the goodwill and co operation of the principal communities concerned' <sup>4</sup>

Except for two purely Provincial parties, the Unionist Party in the Punjab and the Justice Party in Madras, the only other party of any importance besides the Congress was the Moslem League, and it seemed that Mr Jinnah was anxious to extend to the Provincial arena the *entente* he had established at the Centre. The League's electoral manifesto, <sup>5</sup> drafted under his direction, differed on no vital point from that of the Congress. It put forward a

<sup>1</sup> Round Table No 103 pp 563-6

<sup>2</sup> Indian Annual Register 1936 II 230

<sup>3</sup> Speech at Madras 1936 Round Table No 105 p 144

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It may be said, therefore, that the elections had confirmed the 'balance' principle: they had produced Hindu majorities—if the Congress were reckoned as predominantly Hindu—in six Provinces and Moslem majorities in four. But there was a great difference between the two camps. The Congressmen in every Province were backed and disciplined by a single organisation, controlled (as will be seen in the next chapter) by its 'Central' executive. There was no such cohesion, no such unitary organisation in the other camp. In Bengal and Sind the Moslems were divided into warring sections. In the North-West Frontier Province the dominant section had made common cause with the Congress. In the Punjab the Unionist Party, which won 96 seats out of 175, professed to be a Moslem-Hindu-Sikh coalition, and, though most of its members were Moslems and some of them members of the League, the party was not identified with the League, still less in any way under its control. The League, in fact, was strongest in those Provinces in which there was no hope of a Moslem victory, particularly in the United Provinces, the heart of the old Mogul Empire, where the Moslems, though only about 16 per cent. of the population, are largely concentrated in the towns and have always played a part in Provincial politics out of proportion to their numbers.

### 3 THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENTS

In February 1937, when the full results of the elections were known, the Congress leaders drafted a resolution which was duly adopted by the All-India Congress Committee.<sup>1</sup> The Indian people, it declared, had given overwhelming proof that, in agreement with the Congress, they rejected the Act of 1935 and desired to frame their own constitution themselves by means of a Constituent Assembly—a somewhat rhetorical assertion, since only British India was concerned and only about half of its electorate

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Governor-General and the Governors concerned, backed by the Secretary of State, were doing their best to persuade the Congress leaders to take office despite their declared antagonism to the constitution. Thus Lord Linlithgow's statement, though it surrendered no constitutional ground, was meant to be conciliatory and as such it was accepted. When the Congress Working Committee's decision was known, the 'interim' Ministries resigned, and Congress Ministries were appointed in their place. Early in the autumn the Legislatures met.

In two respects the Governments of the seven 'Congress Provinces' (Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces, Orissa and the N W F P) differed from those of the four 'non Congress Provinces' (Bengal, the Punjab, Assam and Sind). In the first place they were all 'pure' Congress Governments, i.e. composed of Congressmen only. Minorities were represented in them—the Moslems in most of them and the Scheduled Castes in two—but all of these minority Ministers were, or became for the purpose of appointment, members of the Congress. In the second place, all the Governments were committed to the same broad programme—the twofold election programme of 'combating' the constitution and of social reform—and all of them were watched and to some extent controlled by the Central Congress Executive. The reasons for this 'unitarian' policy and its results will be discussed in the next chapter.

The personnel of the Ministries was uneven. Most of the Ministers were elderly men—one of the unsatisfactory features of present-day Indian politics is the apparent lack of able young men in the field of leadership—and the Moslem representatives were mostly less capable than their colleagues. By common consent the outstanding figure was Mr C. Rajagopalachari, Premier of Madras. His Ministry and the Bombay and U P Ministries were the best. The C P Ministry was the worst. The general level would have been higher if some of the more prominent Congress leaders—Pandit Nehru in the United Provinces, for example, or Dr R. Prasad in Bihar—had not refrained from taking Provincial office and devoted their time to the work of the 'Central' Congress Executive.

Except in the Central Provinces,<sup>1</sup> all the Ministries maintained their internal coherence and stability during the two years and a half they were in office, and they were freed from external danger by their large and generally well-disciplined majorities in the Legis-

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Confronted with these persistent and growing dangers, the policy of all the Congress Ministries—though more quickly in some cases than in others—was readjusted. Mr Gandhi himself declared at an early stage that the doctrine of 'non-violence' did not require that incitement to violence should go unpunished,<sup>1</sup> and in 1938 the A I C C passed a resolution condemning the advocacy of 'murder, arson, looting, and class war' by individuals and the propagation of falsehood, violence and communal conflict by newspapers and declaring that while its policy of civil liberty was unchanged, the Congress would 'support measures that may be undertaken by the Congress Governments for the defence of life and property'.<sup>2</sup> And the measures that were undertaken were certainly firm. Old powers and precautions were resumed. Before the Congress Ministries came to an end there was little to distinguish their methods of repression from those employed in the non Congress Provinces or indeed under the pre-1937 British régime.

At the same time Ministers' distrust of the police was dispelled—again more rapidly in some Provinces than in others—first by the sheer necessity of using them and drawing on their experience and next by the discovery that they were prepared to serve their new political masters as loyally as they had served their old official

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impose Prohibition throughout their Provinces within three years. This would involve so serious a loss of revenue from excise—about £2½ millions, for example in Bombay—as to endanger the maintenance of the social services, and for that reason the project had been only partially applied when the Ministries resigned. Its full application had, however, been resolved on, and Ministers had made it clear that they expected to overcome the financial obstacle by getting help from the Centre despite the fact that Central funds were needed for Central purposes, especially defence. Mr Gandhi himself was ready to force the issue. 'Deadlocks', he said, meaning presumably the concerted resignation of all the Ministries, 'may justifiably be created for such a noble cause'.<sup>1</sup>

Last but not least, a determined effort was made to grapple with the problem of primary education. Mr Gandhi had long been interested in the technique of Basic Education which by associating a child's book-learning with one or more basic handicrafts has revolutionised the elementary stage of education in several Western countries, and an adaptation of it, known as the 'Wardha Scheme' or 'Mr Gandhi's latest fad', was introduced in most of the Congress Provinces. This highly promising experiment (which has been continued since the Congress resignations) was carried furthest in the United Provinces and Bihar. At the same time a 'literacy' campaign was launched among the adult population. It evoked a warm response and was mainly sustained by unpaid volunteers, but it soon became clear that substantial results could only be achieved—and the same applied to Basic Education—by a considerable expenditure of public money, only obtainable by an increase in the burden of taxation.

Thus again the Congress Ministries were confronted with the perennial problem of ways and means, and it seems probable that, if they had stayed in office longer, they would have realised that they could not attain their social ideals without first raising the productive and taxable capacity of the population. As it was, they betrayed towards the end a tendency, shared by the non-Congress Ministries, to budget for a deficit. Otherwise, and apart from the issue raised by Prohibition, their financial policy was conservative and orthodox. Expenditure on the social services was increased on the average by 14 per cent, but this was usually met by retrenchment and new taxation. Schemes of development, such as electrical and irrigation works, were financed by loans.

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#### 4. THE NON-CONGRESS GOVERNMENTS

Since the reappointment of minority Ministries in the Congress Provinces was plainly impracticable, the Congress resignations brought about the application of Section 93 of the Act of 1935, which provided that, if the government of a Province could not be carried on in accordance with the Act, the Governor could assume all of the powers of government by proclamation. Thus the Congress Provinces became, in popular parlance, 'Governors' Provinces'. It was a clean throwback to autocracy for the Governors, though they appointed Advisers, had no formal Executive Councils, and the Legislatures were suspended. But Section 93 had only been intended to meet a temporary emergency: the Proclamations could only remain in force for six months, and their periodical renewal since 1939 by Acts of Parliament has been due to the fact that the Congress, by continuing to refuse office, has perpetuated the emergency.

This has not meant, of course, the collapse of constitutional government in all British India. In the Punjab and Sind, and, except for one interval of seven months, in Assam, Provincial self government has been in operation since 1937. In Bengal it operated till 1945. In Orissa, moreover, at the end of 1941 and in the N W F P in the spring of 1943, as the result partly of changes of opinion among members of the suspended Legislatures, the Congress lost control, the proclamations were revoked, non-Congress Ministries took office, and the Legislatures reassembled. Thus, at the beginning of this year (1945), six of the eleven Provinces, with an aggregate population of 115 millions, were under parliamentary responsible government.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from its greater length the political record of these Provinces has been similar in some respects to that of the Congress Provinces. A number of useful measures have been enacted. Agrarian reform has been tackled, though not so drastically. Finance has been even more conservative, since it has not been complicated by Prohibition which has only been tried on a very small scale. There have been rather less enthusiasm and advance in education, but there has been a greater proportionate increase in expenditure on the social services as a whole.<sup>2</sup> In the field of administration the maintenance of law and order has likewise been

<sup>1</sup> For recent developments in Bengal, Orissa and the N W I P, see pp. 241-2 below.

<sup>2</sup> In 1939-40 the average increase over expenditure in 1936-7 in Bengal the Punjab, Assam and Sind was 17 per cent. In the estimates for 1942-3 it rose as high as 37 per cent.

#### 4. THE NON-CONGRESS GOVERNMENTS

Since the reappointment of minority Ministries in the Congress Provinces was plainly impracticable, the Congress resignations brought about the application of Section 93 of the Act of 1935, which provided that, if the government of a Province could not be carried on in accordance with the Act, the Governor could assume all of the powers of government by proclamation. Thus the Congress Provinces became, in popular parlance, 'Governors' Provinces'. It was a clean throwback to autocracy for the Governors, though they appointed Advisers, had no formal Executive Councils, and the Legislatures were suspended. But Section 93 had only been intended to meet a temporary emergency: the Proclamations could only remain in force for six months, and their periodical renewal since 1939 by Acts of Parliament has been due to the fact that the Congress, by continuing to refuse office, has perpetuated the emergency.

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operated differently it was first in the composition of the Ministries and secondly in their relations with their Legislatures and with political organisations outside them

All the Congress Ministries were one-party Ministries all the non-Congress Ministries have been Coalitions This contrast sprang from the results of the elections In all the Congress Provinces—for Bombay was practically no exception—the Congress secured safe majorities In Bengal, Assam and Sind none of the many Parties which contested the elections obtained a clear majority, so that Coalitions were inevitable And in the Punjab, though the Unionist Party won 96 seats in the Assembly out of 175, the Ministry it formed was a kind of intercommunal coalition, for, while the members of the Party were mostly Moslems, the Cabinet of six contained two Hindus and one Sikh

Though the Punjab Ministry has had to face a more vigorous and competent Opposition than that which any of the Congress Ministries had to face, and also a mainly hostile press such as scarcely existed in the Congress Provinces, it has retained—at any rate till very recently—something like the internal solidity and external stability which its Congress neighbours enjoyed But the other non-Congress Ministries have not been so fortunate Again till very recently, they have not been closely united in themselves, nor sure of their footing in their Legislatures There have been constant intrigues, shifting of votes, ministerial crises Between 1937 and 1943 there were five changes of government in Sind In Assam the variations if not quite so rapid, were even less justified by any public interest If Mr Fazl-ul-Huq retained the Premiership of Bengal for more than five years, it was mainly due to the schisms in the Opposition ranks, and in the last stage it was only made possible by an uneasy alliance with some of his bitterest opponents It seems clear, in fact, that so far neither Sind nor Assam—backward Provinces with relatively small populations, meagre financial resources, and a scarcity of qualified politicians—has proved itself capable of making a proper use of British parliamentary institutions By the end of 1942, at any rate, no such sweeping judgement could have been passed on Bengal, but it was only in the Punjab that the new constitutional régime had been unquestionably successful

Yet, if there were differences between the non-Congress Provinces in the way the Act of 1935 was worked, they all differed from the Congress Provinces on one cardinal point The two basic principles of the new constitution, responsible government

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## VII

# The Policy of the Congress

### I. THE CONSTITUTION

MEMBERSHIP of the Indian National Congress, also known as the 'Congress Party', is open to any person over 18 who pays an annual subscription of four annas ( $4\frac{1}{2}d.$ ) and declares in writing that he or she accepts the first article of the constitution, viz. 'The object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of *Swaraj* by all legitimate and peaceful means'.<sup>1</sup> The number of these 'primary members', as they are called, has fluctuated. In 1938 they were reported to be  $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions, in 1941  $1\frac{1}{2}$  millions. But the political strength of the Party is not to be measured by these figures. Many Indians would vote for Congress candidates at an election without formally joining the Party—those whom Mr. Gandhi once described as 'the millions of unregistered Congressmen'. Since, moreover, it is more than a party, since it has been the chief vehicle of the Indian nationalist movement from its beginning some sixty years ago, the Congress appeals to the sentiment of many Indian patriots who disapprove its policy.

The primary members are grouped in twenty Provinces, some of which correspond with the Provinces of British India while others are smaller areas based on language. Each Province is divided into urban and rural constituencies which elect their delegates to the representative assembly or Session.

Owing to the war and to the intermittent conflict between the Congress and the Government, no Session has been held since 1940. Normally it meets once a year and is attended by upwards of 2,000 delegates. Its business, which usually takes about a week, is to lay down the general policy of the Congress by voting on resolutions submitted by the All-India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.). Though there is doubtless much discussion behind the scenes and the public debates are lively on occasion, the Session is more like a conference than a parliament. It is all one party. If it has its left and right wings, there is no regular 'Opposition'. On vital issues the A.I.C.C.'s resolutions are never rejected.

The Executive is not appointed at the Session. A few weeks before it is held, the delegates who have been elected in each Province meet as a separate Provincial group for three purposes.

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Mr S C Bose, indeed, when he was President in 1938, likened the office to that of the President of the United States who chooses his own cabinet. But in fact most of the Presidents have been local leaders with little prestige or influence beyond their own Provinces, and Mr Bose was fated to learn that the master of the Congress was not its President but the person whom Pandit Nehru has called its 'permanent super-President'.<sup>1</sup> When he stood for a second term in 1939 Mr Gandhi, who disapproved of his extremist policy, made known his opposition, and, when, notwithstanding, he was re-elected by a small majority, Mr Gandhi threatened to withdraw from the Congress, obtained the backing of the A I C C, forced Mr Bose to resign, and secured the election of his own candidate in his place. Nor is the exercise of the 'super-Presidential' power exceptional or intermittent. Mr Gandhi has always been consulted by the members of the Working Committee—most of whom are friends and comrades of old standing—and has frequently attended its meetings. On critical occasions he has taken the leading part in the public discussions of the A I C C, and the decisions of both Committees and of the Session likewise have usually accorded with his will. As far as is known, the Working Committee has only gone against his opinion three times in recent years, and, each of those times, it changed its mind and reverted to its old allegiance in the end. When moreover, the Congress comes to an open rupture with the Government and launches a 'civil disobedience' campaign, Mr Gandhi takes command of it. 'When we march as an army', he said in his closing address to the Session in 1940, 'we are no longer a democracy. As soldiers we have got to take orders from the General and obey him implicitly. His word must be law. I am your General'.<sup>2</sup> And he controlled the subsequent operations, naming the Congressmen who were to break the law and go to prison.<sup>3</sup> Similarly when 'open rebellion', as he called it, was declared in 1942,<sup>4</sup> the A I C C formally requested Mr Gandhi 'to take the lead' and called on 'the people of India' to 'carry out his instructions'. In accepting his commission he described himself as 'the chief servant of the nation'.

Mr Gandhi's supremacy is not unnatural. He has made the Congress what it is, for it was he who converted it from a movement of the intelligentsia into a movement of the people. If 'he dominates to some extent the Congress', Pandit Nehru has said, it is because he 'dominates the masses'. Mr Gandhi has named the

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, pp 132, 167, 194.

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The character of this great party will be misunderstood if it is regarded as only a party in the normal sense of the word. It is much more than that. Since 1920 it has been the vehicle of a revolutionary nationalist movement; and, while from time to time it has shared alongside other parties in the working of the existing constitution, it has, unlike those other parties, pledged itself to combat that constitution and destroy it. Nor is that all. As will be seen in the next section of this chapter, it has planned not only to bring the British Raj to an end but to take its place. To achieve those objects it has seemed essential that the movement should remain united. Most nationalist causes have suffered—some are grievously suffering to-day—from dissension in the patriots' ranks; and vast and varied India provides all too many opportunities for schism. For that very practical reason the political philosophy of the Congress is unitarian. Its own organisation, as has been seen, is highly centralised; and, till recently at any rate, its leaders held that in the constitution of the future free India the Centre should be made as strong as possible. The scheme, moreover, for drafting that constitution, which was expounded by the Working Committee in 1939 and adopted by the Session in 1940, is on a unitary basis. A Constituent Assembly is to be elected by adult suffrage throughout the country. It is to represent the 'nation' or the 'people' taken as a whole. The Provinces as such will have no voice; but the minorities can have separate electorates if they wish, and disagreements on minority rights can be referred to arbitration. Otherwise the provisions of the constitution will be decided by majority vote. This, it is asserted, is 'the only democratic method of determining the constitution of a free country'.<sup>1</sup>

One of the reasons why Pandit Nehru opposed the acceptance of office in the new Provincial Governments in 1937 was the threat which it involved to this unitarian creed. For the twin foundations of the new constitution were responsible government and Provincial autonomy. The Provinces were to be relieved from the 'superintendence, direction, and control' of the Centre in order that their Governments should be as fully and widely responsible as possible to their Provincial Legislatures and to the Provincial electorates behind them. And on this substructure of autonomous Provinces—together with autonomous States—the future Federation of all India was to rest. If, then, the Congress was to share in working this constitution, would it not be undermining the national unity of the movement just when it needed confirming

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scandal involving one of the Ministers precipitated a crisis. It was resolved by a change of Government, but Dr. Khare's removal was not brought about by a vote of no-confidence in the Legislature, still less by a general election. He was first formally condemned by the Working Committee, and then his successor was chosen by the Provincial Congress Committee at a meeting attended by the Congress President and other leaders from outside the Province.

This was not an exceptional case of 'Central' interference in Provincial concerns. On the contrary that interference was as regular and systematic as it was thoroughgoing. The Congress Ministers were subjected from the outset to the supervision of the Parliamentary sub-Committee of the Working Committee. Even the composition of his Cabinet was not a matter for a Premier's sole decision. And on all important questions the advice of the Working Committee was expected to be asked and to be taken. It is not suggested that, in itself and apart from the reactions it provoked, this 'Central' control was necessarily a bad thing. In some ways it strengthened the Congress Ministries: it ensured the disciplined support of their followers in the Legislatures: it repressed (as will be seen) the claims of non-ministerial Congress bodies to take a hand in government: it helped to adjust disputes and keep the Ministries on an even keel. But there was one aspect of it which impaired rather than enhanced the strength of Congress administration. As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, all the Congress Ministries suffered from a sense of insecurity. They could not look far ahead or make long-term plans of social progress. At any moment the Working Committee might decide that the time had come for the Congress to engage in another round of open conflict with the Government. The issue would probably be one which concerned all India and not the Provinces directly; but the inevitable first step in a campaign of 'non-co-operation', to be reinforced perhaps by 'civil disobedience', would be the resignation of the Congress Provincial Ministries. That is what happened in 1939. It is believed that some of the Premiers obeyed the Working Committee's orders with reluctance, but they did obey them. This was a final proof of the extent to which the decentralising purpose of the new constitution had been reversed. The Congress Provinces had been subjected to a 'superintendence, direction and control' by the Congress 'Centre' at least as rigorous as that which the official Central Government had once exercised.

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With such plans in mind the Congress constituted itself an *imperium in imperio*, a sort of State within the State. Like other nationalist organisations in the past—Sinn Fein in Ireland, for example—it established a 'parallel' system of government side by side with the official or legal system. As described earlier in this chapter, it has had its own deliberative and executive institutions, both Central and Provincial. During one of its 'civil disobedience' campaigns it set up its own courts in some districts. It has long flown its own tricolour flag, and in *Bande Mataram*, a Hindu patriotic song first sung in Bengal, it possesses a kind of 'national anthem'. Thus, when the new Provincial constitution came into force in 1937, a Congress Government of a sort was already in existence, with its own political organisation and its own patriotic symbolism, prepared to 'take delivery', if not yet at the Centre, at any rate in the Provincial field. The upshot was a curious dualism. In law the Governments of the Congress Provinces were linked with that of British India as a whole and thus associated with its official Centre. But they were also and at the same time incorporated in the 'parallel' Congress system and associated much more closely with the Congress 'Centre'.

It was not only the Working Committee's control of the Congress Ministries that showed that a 'Congress Raj' had been established in their Provinces. It was betrayed by the conduct and bearing of Congressmen, both in the performance of public duties and as individuals, at the outset of the new régime. *Bande Mataram* was sung to open proceedings in the Provincial Legislatures. The tricolour was hoisted over local administrative buildings. And, not unnaturally, all the subordinate branches of the 'parallel' Government now felt themselves authorised to govern. Congress Committees issued orders. In some districts Congress police stations were opened and Congress police began to investigate crime. More disquieting to those who remembered the part played by para-military formations in Europe, the United Provinces Provincial Committee set up a 'Military Department' and declared its intention of raising a Provincial force 500,000 strong to be brigaded

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likened to that of the Axis dictators. But the essence of totalitarianism is not in its methods but in its principle, and its principle is simply one-party government or the identification of the Party with the State. When the Congress Governments took office, this identification did in fact come about. It was manifest not only in the symbolism—the flag and the ‘national anthem’—nor only in the pretensions of committees or individual members of the party to be part of the Government machine, but also in the Governments’ allegiance to the Congress ‘Centre’. Ministers did not regard themselves as servants of the Crown—to use the terminology of the British parliamentary system—but as servants of the Congress. Nor was this attitude comparable with that of the leaders of a party in a Western democracy who, having won an election and formed a Government, maintain their loyalty to the party and accept, maybe, the control of its ‘caucus’. For they know that their power is a temporary trust and that sooner or later the leaders of another party will take their place. But in the Congress Provinces in 1937, so omnipotent was the electoral machine, so overwhelming the triumph at the polls, that the Congress control in most, if not quite all of them, seemed assured for an almost indefinite time to come. Hence the checks on a party dictatorship which operate in Western democracies—the uncertain issue of the next election, the desire to conciliate hostile and win over neutral elements of public opinion, the need for compromise with minority views in sum, the substitution, as far as practicable, of government by discussion for government by the sheer weight of a majority—all those checks were absent. The minority parties did not count, they were not consulted, their opposition was firmly voted down. It was impossible, in fact, to evade the truth that the idea of a ‘Congress Raj’ had materialised. The Congress had ‘taken delivery’ in most of the Provinces. It intended soon, no doubt, to take it at the Centre.

#### 4 INTERVENTION IN THE STATES

In seeking to extend the Congress Raj from the Congress Provinces to the Centre the Congress leaders were confronted by the same two main difficulties which had beset the earlier efforts of British and Indian statesmen to build up a just and stable settlement out of the shifting complex of Indian politics—the problem of the minorities and the problem of the States. A Congress Raj in British India implied the acquiescence of the minorities, and

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awakening of the States' peoples and declared that there was no half-way house between the total extinction of the Rulers and their acceptance of full responsible government. It was on this occasion that he warned them (as recorded above) that the Congress was likely before long 'to replace the Paramount Power'.<sup>1</sup> Early in 1939 this firm language was echoed in more strident tones by Pandit Nehru as President of the All-India States' People's Conference. Stagnation and decay, he said, were imposed on the States by British imperialism. The Congress would never recognise the treaty-system, nor tolerate British intervention to uphold it. Responsible government in the States was an inevitable part of 'the larger freedom of India now in sight'. 'The time approaches when the final solution has to come—the Constituent Assembly of all the Indian people framing the constitution of a free and democratic India'.<sup>2</sup>

Meantime individual Congressmen were at work in some of the States, promoting 'civil disobedience', and in March Mr. Gandhi himself made a dramatic demonstration in Rajkot.<sup>3</sup> More alarming were the disturbances in the leading states of Hyderabad, Kashmir and Travancore, and in the two former the trouble was aggravated by communal strife. Their rulers, Pandit Nehru caustically remarked, were 'apt pupils of British imperialism' and had learnt the art of utilising communal differences to check popular movements.<sup>4</sup> But in the circumstances communal antagonism required no artificial stimulus in Hyderabad, where the Nizam and the ruling class are Moslems while 85 per cent. of the people are Hindus, or in Kashmir, where the Maharaja and the ruling class are Hindus and 76 per cent. of the people Moslems. As long as the rulers were autocrats, no section of their subjects could dispute their will. That is the chief reason why the record of the States as a whole in the matter of communal strife had hitherto been so markedly better than that of British India. But now that a sub

<sup>1</sup> *Hartian* 3 December 1938

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<sup>4</sup> *Unity of India* p. 41

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The Scheduled Castes contain no less than 50 million people—about half the number of the Moslem community—but the strength of their moral position is not reflected in their organisation and resources. They are too weak to contest successfully the Congress claim to represent them. Except in Bombay, their spokesmen in the Legislatures elected in 1937 were mostly either Congressmen or under Congress influence. The six million Sikhs constitute a formidable but primarily a local problem, a problem of the Punjab rather than of India as a whole. It is the Moslems, now numbering about 100 millions, who have always been the major crux. But in 1937 the political organisation of the community was still relatively backward. True, the great majority of the Moslem seats at the elections were won by non Congress Moslems, but they were candidates of various local parties: there was no common Moslem front. The League was the strongest party in the Hindu majority Provinces, but it was still mainly composed of upper-class politicians, its membership was relatively small: it had little contact with the Moslem masses, and in the Moslem majority Provinces its position was even weaker. It was little known on the Frontier. In the Punjab it was overshadowed by the Unionist Party. Neither in Bengal nor in Sind had it won a majority of Moslem votes. Nevertheless its mere existence invalidated the Congress claim to speak for all Indian Moslems who desired the freedom of India.

In this situation two choices were open to the Congress leaders after their victory at the polls. One was to take the League into partnership, to constitute Congress League Coalition Ministries in the Congress majority Provinces. This is what Mr Jinnah had plainly suggested before the elections,<sup>1</sup> and what was definitely expected in the U P, where the League was strongest. To politicians schooled in the British parliamentary tradition this choice might well have seemed attractive: the morrow of a victory, it might have been thought, was the time for compromise and conciliation. But the Congress leaders took the other path. They decided not to come to terms with the League but to override it and try to absorb it. This was not because, as their critics said, they were 'drunk with victory'. There were substantial arguments in favour of a militant and uncompromising policy. In the first place Coalition Governments, even though the Congress might be the predominant partner, were not the 'Congress Raj' on which so many Congressmen had set their hearts. They would prohibit unitary control from the Congress 'Centre' both in the campaign

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majority decisions of the Party like any other members <sup>1</sup> Since the Congress seemed assured of an electoral majority in most, if not all, of these Provinces for an indefinite time to come, the choice thus presented to the League leaders was hard. They must either dissolve the League and be absorbed in an organisation which, though non-communal in principle, was overwhelmingly Hindu in personnel, or lose all chance of office in their Provincial Government for as long ahead as they could see.

Secondly, the Congress leaders launched what was known as a 'mass contact' movement among the scattered Moslem country-folk. They were told that the Congress victory implied no threat to their religion, for the Congress was non-communal and had repeatedly pledged itself to safeguard the rights of all communities <sup>2</sup> The real issue was not communal but economic, and the Congress, not the League, was the champion of the poor and had put in hand a drastic policy of agrarian reform which would benefit Moslem peasants equally with Hindu. Let them, therefore, strengthen the hands of the Congress in its task of social uplift by joining those many Moslems who had been members of the Party since its birth.

In contrast with the campaign in the States this attempt to coerce the League was an unqualified failure. The Moslem reaction to it must be described in a separate chapter, for it marks an historic turning-point in the course of Indian politics.

<sup>1</sup> Document 3 p. 294 below

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communal pride and pugnacity awakened by Congress policy, he was fast becoming *the* leader

In the face of these developments it was difficult for Congress men to go on saying that the League did not count and that the bulk of Moslem opinion was really on the Congress side. And soon there was still clearer proof that these pretensions were untenable. At its outset the 'mass contact' movement seemed to be going well: numbers of countryfolk were enrolled in the Congress ranks, one or two by-elections to Moslem seats were won by Moslem Congressmen. But before long the tide began to turn. The village *mullahs* told their flocks that to say that politics had nothing to do with religion was blasphemy, and the League politicians, warned by the Congress example, began to extend their party organisation to the countryside and seek contact with the Moslem masses. The results were soon apparent in the record of by-elections. All over India a swing to the League set in which has continued ever since. Between the general elections of 1937 and the summer of 1943<sup>1</sup> there were 61 by-elections to Moslem seats in the Provincial Legislatures filled by separate Moslem electorates. Of these, the League (reckoning Moslem voters for the Punjab Unionist Party in this period as also voters for the League) won 47, independent Moslems 10, Congress Moslems 4. Of the 14 by-elections to the Central Legislature between 1934 and 1943 the League won 7 and the Congress 2.<sup>2</sup>

The growing power of the League seems to have bred in Mr Jinnah's mind something akin to the intransigence of the Congress leaders in 1937. Though many Moslems were Congressmen and though there were one or two independent Moslem organisations which repudiated the League's policy, he insisted that the League should be recognised as the only body qualified to represent the Moslem community. Such a claim was no more acceptable to the Congress than the Congress claim had been acceptable to Mr Jinnah, and in the light of it a somewhat half-hearted attempt to

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Among the educated Moslems, it may safely be said, the so-called 'atrocities' were not the main reason for their recoil from the Congress Raj. They rejected its claim to be super-communal, they regarded it as tantamount to a Hindu Raj, but they can hardly have supposed that it directly or immediately threatened the maintenance of their religious rights and customs. More disquieting was the prospect that Hindu political power would mean the strengthening of the stranglehold of Hindu business men, from the big capitalist to the little moneylender, on Moslem economic life. And behind that lay something still more menacing, if more impalpable. Though many of its members might be genuinely non-communal, the mentality of the Congress was essentially Hindu. It was largely inspired by Mr. Gandhi, who, though a sympathetic student of many religions, was confessedly devoted to the old traditions of Hinduism. Thus all Congress policy seemed in Moslem eyes to be threaded with Hindu ideas or tendencies. Ironically enough, it was one of the best features of the Congress régime, its active interest in popular education, which excited most suspicion. It was not only Mr. Gandhi's notorious enthusiasm for the teaching of basic handicrafts. Hindu schoolmasters in many schools required their pupils, whatever their faith, to accord a ceremonial, almost a religious reverence to the Mahatma. Some of the text-books, too, seemed to glorify Hinduism at the expense of Islam. Were not Moslem children being insensibly and insidiously indoctrinated with Hindu ways of thought? And the prospects in higher education seemed equally alarming. Moslem backwardness in this field was undeniable. Would the balance ever be redressed if political power was a permanent Hindu monopoly?

Another disquieting fact was that, while the numerical strength of the Congress was now falling, that of the Hindu Mahasabha was rising. For the Mahasabha, founded a decade earlier as a purely cultural organisation, had now become primarily political, and under its fiery President, Mr. V. D. Savarkar, <sup>2</sup> was proclaiming an uncompromising doctrine of Hindu ascendancy. The Congress was fiercely attacked just because it professed to be non-communal.

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Mr Jinnah repudiated the principles on which it had been framed. A democratic system of parliamentary government, he said, based on the concept of a homogeneous nation and the method of counting heads, was impossible in India.<sup>1</sup> When the Congress Ministries resigned, Mr Jinnah declared that they must never come back, and the observance of 'a day of deliverance and thanksgiving' was organised by the League throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

No less drastic was the transformation of Mr Jinnah's ideas about the Centre. It will be remembered again that in 1937 he was still a champion of Federation and that his chief quarrel with the Federal part of the Act of 1935 was that it did not provide enough responsible government.<sup>3</sup> But now the prospect of responsible government at the Centre was even more intolerable than in the Provinces since it would be exercised over all India over Moslem majority as well as Hindu majority Provinces, and it was clear that the Congress leaders aimed at creating at the Centre something like the 'Congress Raj' they had created in their Provinces. What could prevent it? Not minority 'safeguards', nor separate electorates. In Moslem eyes the former had proved useless, and it was now evident that the latter were of small avail as long as they were concerned with the composition of the legislature only and not of the executive as well. Reliance on the inevitability of Coalition Governments had proved no less misguided, and the Congress agitation in the States seemed to show that the idea of their acting as a neutral and balancing element at the Centre was also likely to be falsified for either they would stay out of the Federation or would enter it in more democratic guise and under Congress influence.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons the Federal scheme of 1935 was now entirely repudiated by the League. So was the Congress plan for framing a home made constitution to take its place. The Constituent Assembly, said Mr Jinnah in 1939 would be nothing but 'a packed body, manœuvred and managed by a Congress caucus'.<sup>5</sup>

So far the League's policy was merely negative, but from the autumn of 1938 onwards a new and positive doctrine was taking shape in Moslem minds. It countered the logic of democracy with the logic of nationalism. If Indian Moslems were no more than a 'community' within one Indian nation, then since they numbered

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India in the rest the Hindus would predominate. The Regions would be federal, the Provinces and States retaining their autonomy and continuing to exercise most of their existing powers. But the Regional Legislatures would deal with subjects of common interest to the component units at their request, and they would take over some of the subjects entrusted to the Centre by the Act of 1935 and would share with the Centre in the control of some other subjects.

Sir Sikander's treatment of the Centre is a striking illustration of the extent to which the prospect of a Congress Raj had undermined the conception of Indian unity. He stood in the front rank of Indian statesmen. That the Punjab was the only Province in which the parliamentary system had been a real success was mainly his doing and mainly due to his wholehearted policy of inter-communal co-operation. He was well aware that India needs a strong Central Government, but, unlike most Hindu doctrinaires, he had realised that, at this stage of India's political evolution, Provincial patriotism was safer ground to build on than the still nascent consciousness of Indian nationhood and had warmly supported the principle of Provincial autonomy as embodied in the Act of 1935. But now he believed that the Moslems—so greatly had their fear of a Hindu Raj been quickened—would no longer acquiesce in a Federation of the normal type. He proposed, therefore, first that the field of Central authority should be reduced to the barest minimum—foreign affairs, defence, tariffs, currency—and, secondly, that the Centre should be what he called an 'Agency Centre', acting not in its own right as a national all-India Government but as agent for the Regions and their component units, which had entrusted some of their common concerns to its charge.<sup>1</sup> This was a new constitutional idea. Regionalism so conceived lies between a normal Federation and a mere Confederacy or League.

The weakness of the Punjab plan, as it may fairly be called, was that the demarcation of the Regions seems to have been governed by political convenience rather than economic interests and that the communal 'balance' it established at the Centre—five Hindu Regions to two Moslem—was even more uneven than the existing Provincial 'balance' of seven to four. However 'minimal' the scope of the Centre's authority, would the Moslems in their present mood tolerate its exercise by so great a Hindu majority? Would they tolerate *any* Hindu majority in *any* Centre? In other

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Two comments seem permissible. In the first place the doubts so persistently expressed by British statesmen in the past as to the possibility of successfully transplanting the British system of parliamentary government in India had been justified. The 'faith' of 1919 had so far proved illusory. The communal schism was still too deep to allow the operation of simple majority rule. In the second place, though British criticism of the Congress is bound to be regarded by Congressmen as biased because the Congress has been the most vigorous opponent of British rule, British sympathisers with the cause of Indian nationalism can do it no service by evading the plain fact that, whatever faults the other parties concerned may have committed, the chief reason why the domestic political situation in India had deteriorated by 1940 to a point which would have seemed almost inconceivable a few years earlier was the manifest purpose of the Congress to take over the heritage of the British Raj. And, if that be so, it seems legitimate to ask whether the main body of Indian nationalists might not have done better if they had followed the Liberals along Mr. Gokhale's path of co-operation with Britain rather than taken Mr. Gandhi's path of non-co-operation and revolt. If they had made the most of the Acts of 1919 and 1935, trusting in the last resort to the liberal tradition of the British people and their growing desire that India should become a full free partner in the Commonwealth, might they not have been nearer to their goal to-day?

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there was no intimation of dissent from the confident assertion that India would play her full part in the war. At the same time a Defence of India Bill, equipping the Central Government with emergency powers for the conduct of the war, was introduced and, after full debate and some amendments, carried in both houses without a division.<sup>1</sup> Only the Congress members were absent, obeying the orders which, as will be seen, the Working Committee had issued a few weeks earlier.<sup>2</sup> Nor was this by any means the only manifestation of Indian public opinion assenting to India's participation in the war. The Premiers of Bengal, the Punjab and Sind, backed by majorities in their Legislatures which represented in the aggregate over 90 million people, pledged their Provinces to the war effort. Most of the political parties took the same line. The executive of the National Liberal Federation, for example, while asking for a policy of political appeasement, declared that this was 'not a time for bargaining' and that India should unhesitatingly and unconditionally support the democratic Powers.<sup>3</sup> The Mahasabha Working Committee similarly denounced 'the spirit of bargaining' and affirmed that India must co-operate with Britain in defence.<sup>4</sup> As for Indian India, the Princes individually assured the Governor-General of their full support on the outbreak of the war, and at the next meeting of their Chamber a unanimous resolution was passed promising the British Government all possible aid in men, money and material 'for upholding the cause of justice and maintaining the sacredness of treaties'.<sup>5</sup> But the chorus was not complete. The voices of the two parties which mattered most were missing.

Congress foreign policy had long been mainly shaped by Pandit Nehru who has had much wider personal contact with the outside world than any of his fellow leaders. The speech he made in 1936 on the gathering clouds in Europe and the chance a war would give the Congress of achieving its aims has been quoted in an earlier chapter.<sup>6</sup> During the next three years he was an outspoken critic of the British policy of 'appeasement', and at the Session in

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On September 15 the Working Committee declared its policy in a lengthy resolution drafted by Pandit Nehru. The gist of its argument was that 'the issue of peace and war must be decided by the Indian people', that any co-operation 'must be between equals by mutual consent for a cause which both consider worthy', and that, while wholly on the side of freedom, India cannot fight for it unless she herself is free. The British Government was invited, therefore, to state 'in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged'. 'Do they include the elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people?'<sup>2</sup> On October 10 a resolution of the A.I.C.C., while renewing the request for a definition of war aims, called also for immediate action. 'India must be declared an independent nation, and present application must be given to this status to the largest possible extent.'<sup>3</sup>

If the Congress was making demands, so was the League. On September 18 its Working Committee followed the Congress lead in denouncing Nazi aggression and declaring its sympathy with the cause of the democracies; but it warned the British Government that it could count on solid Moslem support only on two conditions. Moslems must be given 'justice and fair play' in the Congress Provinces, and no assurances must be given as to constitutional advance, nor any new constitution framed, 'without the consent and approval' of the League, 'the only organisation that can speak on behalf of Muslim India'.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile Lord Linlithgow was sounding opinion among all the leading politicians. He interviewed over fifty persons, including Mr. Jinnah and other Moslems, and Pandit Nehru and other Congressmen. On October 17 he issued a public statement. As to war aims, he repeated the British Prime Minister's declaration that Britain sought no material advantage for herself, but desired the establishment of a better international system and a real and lasting peace. As to the freedom of India, he renewed the pledge that Dominion Status, a status of complete equality in self-government

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 23 September and 4 November 1939

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the British Government, was now in open conflict with it. As a first move the Committee 'calls upon the Congress Ministries to tender their resignations'—which they did. The 'programme of resistance, the resolution continued requires perfect discipline within the Congress ranks' <sup>1</sup> Mr Gandhi stated later that the control of any 'civil disobedience' movement that might be launched had been entrusted to him <sup>2</sup>

The League's attitude was less definite. In its resolution of October 22 the Working Committee did not accept the Governor-General's statement as a basis for its co-operation in the war effort, but it did not reject it: it asked for 'further discussion'. One point in the statement it attacked. The federal scheme of 1935 should not be reconsidered: it should be scrapped and an entirely new constitution devised. Another point, which according to the Congress resolution had been raised merely as a screen for British imperialism, was expressly commended by the League—the stress laid on minority opinion <sup>3</sup>

In November Lord Linlithgow made one more effort to bring about a settlement. He interviewed Mr Gandhi, Mr Jinnah and Dr Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President for 1939-40, and 'begged them in the most earnest manner' to come to terms on the issue of the Provincial Ministries as a prelude to co-operation at the Centre. It was no use. The Congress leaders declined 'to consider any steps to further co-operation unless the policy of the British Government is made clear on the lines suggested by the Congress', and insisted that the communal question could only be settled by a Constituent Assembly according to the Congress plan. Such an attitude on the part of the Congress leaders said Mr Jinnah precluded any discussion between them and him <sup>4</sup>

So the deadlock was created which has lasted ever since. Neither the Congress nor the League was willing to support the war effort except on contradictory terms. But there was an important practical difference in the position of the two great parties then and thereafter. No Congressman associated himself with the official conduct of the war: non-co-operation was complete. The League 'high command', on the other hand, while not committing the League to co-operation as an organisation, acquiesced in its members continuing to hold office in Provincial Governments fully engaged in the war effort and in their co-operating as individuals in many other ways.

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register* 1939 II 237-9

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control the constitutional advance of India which Parliament had exercised at every previous stage, since it made it practically impossible for Parliament to repudiate a constitution on which Indians were agreed. But there were two provisos. First, British obligations must be fulfilled—an allusion to such matters as defence, minority rights, and the treaties with the States, which will be discussed in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, minority opinion must not be overridden.

It goes without saying that they [the British Government] could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government.

Constitutional issues, the statement continued, could not be decided at 'a moment when the Commonwealth is engaged in a struggle for existence'—it was the eve of the Battle of Britain—but after the war a representative Indian constitution making body would be set up and Indian proposals as to its form and operation would at any time be welcome. Meanwhile the decision to enlarge the Central Executive Council and to establish an Advisory War Council would be brought into effect, and it was hoped that all parties and communities would co-operate in India's war effort and thus pave the way for her attainment of free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup>

The reaction of the Congress to this 'August Offer', as it was afterwards called, was swift and violent. President Azad refused Lord Linkthgow's invitation to discuss it.<sup>3</sup> 'It widens the gulf', said Mr. Gandhi, 'between India *as represented by the Congress* and England'.<sup>4</sup> The whole conception of Dominion Status for India, observed Pandit Nehru, was 'as dead as a doornail'.<sup>5</sup> The most pernicious feature of the statement, it was said, was its treatment of the minority problem. That issue, said the Working Committee's resolution of August 22, 'has been made into an insuperable barrier to India's progress'.<sup>6</sup>

The reaction of the League was naturally different. The statement was interpreted as a welcome proof that the fears so often

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This is one of the most puzzling of Mr Gandhi's pronouncements. Could he suppose that it was practical politics for the British Government to withdraw until an Indian Government had been formed to take over its authority? Or that British public opinion would acquiesce in an abdication which might, he admitted, immediately result in civil war? And how could he square his 'out-and-out non-violence' with the belief that a just and lasting settlement of the communal problem could be achieved by force, however brief its exercise?

### 3 SATYAGRAHA

The reaction of the Congress leaders to the 'August Offer' threw them back to Mr Gandhi and the policy of non-co operation. In mid-September the A I C C, while commending the British nation's courage in adversity and declaring that nothing must be done to embarrass it, insisted that the Congress must be conceded 'the fullest freedom to pursue its policy'. What this meant was explained by Mr. Gandhi. 'I claim the liberty of going through the streets of Bombay and saying that I shall have nothing to do with this war'. Independence was no longer the immediate issue. 'Our demand is for freedom of speech'. If this were rejected, the 'next step', a campaign of non-violent 'civil disobedience' (*satyagraha*), would be 'inevitable'.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Gandhi sought an interview with Lord Linlithgow who explained to him how conscientious objectors to war were treated in Britain. Mr Gandhi was not content with that. He must be

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be 'an invitation to civil war' Nor should it be abandoned Its strength, he had said at an earlier stage, was irrelevant it was a 'moral protest', a token of the yearning 'to achieve the freedom of 350 million people through purely non-violent effect and therefore to affect the future destiny of the world' <sup>1</sup> ('An ambitious claim', he had added, 'but it is there') So the movement was not 'officially' suspended It gradually petered out

Mr Gandhi's disciples have claimed that credit is due to him for abstaining from 'mass action', and it is true that the campaign had not seriously 'embarrassed' the Government But its effects on the general situation were unquestionably harmful It reinforced the note of unrealism or make-believe in Indian politics Many of the *satyagrahis*—Mr Rajagopalachari, for example—were certainly not pacifists, nor could they have believed that any Government, however liberal, could permit unqualified freedom of speech in war time And the campaign at once evaded and enhanced the real crux of the Indian problem, Hindu-Moslem relations It was condemned at its outset by the Moslem leaders Mr Gandhi's demand meant, said the Premier of the Punjab, 'that, while Britain is engaged in a life and-death struggle, he should be given freedom to stab her in the back That the stabbing is to be non-violent makes no difference' <sup>2</sup> Mr Jinnah was less concerned with Britain's danger than with that of his community To yield to the Congress he said, would put Moslem India 'under the heel of the Hindu Raj' <sup>3</sup> And, no doubt, the spectacle of the Congress forces, operating according to plan at the behest of their 'super-President', was one of the reasons for the steady growth of Mr Jinnah's prestige in Moslem circles On this point the Punjab Premier's attitude was particularly significant Shortly before the passing of the 'Pakistan resolution', Sir Sikander had expounded in the Punjab Assembly his own solution of the constitutional problem and had pleaded for communal concord in the Punjab as a step towards attaining it in India as a whole If Pakistan meant, he said, 'a Muslim Raj here and a Hindu Raj elsewhere I will have nothing to do with it' <sup>4</sup> Yet, not long after, he felt obliged to pay at least lip-service to the official doctrine of the League In the summer of 1941, when, without conceding Mr Jinnah's 'fifty-fifty' claim, Lord Linlithgow enlarged the Executive Council and established the advisory Defence Council, Mr

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The stiffening of the political deadlock did not mean that India's war effort was declining. The Indian Army was fighting with all its traditional bravery in Africa and the Middle and Far East, and recruits were streaming in at home at least as fast as they could be equipped. The Indian munitions industry was likewise undergoing a vast expansion, and Indian workers were now producing enough arms and equipment not only for the whole of the Indian Army, except in heavy artillery and tanks, but also for the British forces on the Nile and in the Middle East. The meeting of the Eastern Group Conference at Delhi and the establishment of an Eastern Group Supply Council revealed that India had become a vital economic base for all those parts of the British Empire which bordered on the Indian Ocean and the South-East Pacific. Nor, of course, was it only Indian soldiers and workers that were taking part in the war effort. The Indian members of the Central Executive Council and most of those Indians who attended the Central Legislature, the Ministries of the four non-Congress Provinces—there were soon to be five and ultimately six—and the majorities in the Legislatures which supported them were all wholeheartedly committed to the war. Behind them stood the great body of Indian civil servants, at the Centre and in the Provinces, at least half a million strong. And alongside them stood the Governments and growing forces and expanding factories of the Indian States.

Nevertheless India could not be at war in the way that Britain was at war as long as a majority of politically-minded Indians regarded it with a divided mind. They hated Nazism and Fascism. They sympathised with China and, especially after Hitler's attack on her, with Russia. Save the relatively few who fully shared in Mr. Gandhi's pacifism, they wanted to fight for China and for Russia. But they did not want to fight for Britain, still less under British control. Yet this was a supreme crisis in the history of mankind, and now was the time for India to prove her nationhood, to throw her full strength into the cause of civilisation, to win her right to share in the new post-war ordering of the world. But

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## Cripps and Gandhi

### I. REACTION TO THE JAPANESE ADVANCE

**D**URING Mr. Gandhi's long campaign of 'civil disobedience' the danger of the war's approach to India had receded. The Axis had been checked in Egypt and had failed to occupy the Middle East. But in the winter of 1941-2 Pearl Harbour and the spectacular Japanese advance suddenly brought the war as near to India as it had been to Britain in 1940. In March an invasion was thought to be imminent; and it seemed at least doubtful whether the British and Indian forces available would suffice to prevent the irresistible Japanese from overrunning the country as they had overrun Malaya and Burma.

It might have been supposed that the gravity of the danger would have broken the internal deadlock and forced the Indian leaders to join hands both with the British Government and with each other in defence of their threatened country. But this did not happen. Only among those Indians who had shared from the outset in the war effort was the sense of comradeship strengthened by the common danger. Elsewhere antagonism to Britain deepened. The collapse of British sea-power, it was said, had robbed the British Raj of its only useful feature—the security it had given India from invasion—and there was a new bitterness now in the complaint that India had been 'dragged' into the war. If there was little evidence of pro-Japanese sentiment,<sup>1</sup> there was plenty of defeatism. Let us do nothing, some said, to antagonise Japan.<sup>2</sup> Nor was there any narrowing of the Hindu-Moslem breach. The advance of the Japanese seemed actually to widen it.

A few days before Pearl Harbour, as it happened, the Central Government had made a conciliatory gesture. The *satyagrahis* who were still in prison and also Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad were released. All the Congress leaders were thus free to attend the mid-winter meetings of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. They were the first to be held since 1940 when those bodies, after breaking with Mr. Gandhi and proposing a measure

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## 2 THE CRIPPS MISSION

Some time before the hope of holding Burma as a bastion for the defence of India faded, the British Government had decided to make another attempt to break the deadlock, but it was not till March 11, four days after the fall of Rangoon, that Mr Churchill announced that the War Cabinet had come to a unanimous decision on Indian policy with a view to rallying ‘all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader’, and that Sir Stafford Cripps, who had recently joined the Government as Lord Privy Seal and become a member of the War Cabinet and Leader of the House of Commons, would go as soon as possible to India for personal consultation with all parties concerned.

To send a Minister of Sir Stafford’s standing to discuss a settlement face to face with Indian politicians was an unprecedented

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1. In order to achieve 'the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India', the British Government proposes that steps should be taken to create a new Indian Union which will have the full status of a Dominion with the power to secede, if it chooses, from the British Commonwealth.

2. 'Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities' a constitution-making body shall be set up, representing both British India and the States, and the British Government undertakes to accept and implement the constitution framed by that body on two conditions. (a) Any Province or Provinces which do not acquiesce in the new constitution will be entitled to frame a constitution of their own giving them 'the same full status as the Indian Union'; and any State or States shall be similarly free to adhere to the new constitution or not. (b) A Treaty shall be negotiated between the British Government and the constitution-making body to cover 'all matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands'.

3. In the meantime the British Government must retain control of the defence of India 'as part of their world war effort', but the task of organising the military, moral and material resources of India rest with the Government of India in co-operation with its peoples, and to that end it invites the immediate participation of their leaders 'in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations'.

These proposals were an advance on the 'August Offer' in four respects. (1) Liberty to secede from the Commonwealth, which had been generally regarded as implicit in Dominion Status, was explicitly affirmed. (2) The responsibility for framing the new constitution was now to be wholly, not primarily, Indian; a concrete plan was submitted for the creation of the constitution-making body; and the British Government pledged itself to accept its conclusions, subject, as before, to the fulfilment of British obligations. (3) A specific method of fulfilling these obligations was now proposed—a bilateral treaty. The position of the Moslem-majority areas was also safeguarded, and that of the States as well, by the right of non-adherence to the new constitution. This was the most sharply criticised feature of the Draft Declaration; but it is difficult to question the psychological truth of Sir Stafford's remark that, 'If you want to persuade a number of people, who are inclined to be antagonistic, to enter the same room, it is unwise to tell them that, once they go in, there is no way out'.<sup>1</sup> To offer the choice of non-adherence, moreover, was the only practical answer to the Congress charge that the British

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Meanwhile the Japanese were making it clear that the defence of India was indeed the immediate and paramount question—the primary object, as Sir Stafford frequently declared, of his Mission. The report of the occupation of the Andaman Islands, an outpost of India, was published on the day the negotiations began. The British evacuation of Prome was known on April 3. On April 6 the first bombs fell on Indian soil on the sea-board of Madras.

Naturally, therefore, the discussions at Delhi soon centred on defence. The Congress leaders claimed that, in order to rally the Indian public to a maximum effort of patriotism, there must be an Indian Defence Minister. This was conceded on the British side, but it was held that the Commander-in-Chief (then Sir Archibald Wavell) could not transfer his major duties to a civilian colleague in the middle of the war. This obstacle did not seem insuperable. Formulas, apportioning responsibility, were interchanged. On April 9 a settlement seemed in sight. But then the attitude of the Working Committee suddenly stiffened. When its representatives, Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru, saw Sir Stafford on April 10, they passed on from defence to the wider constitutional issue. The only National Government, it now appeared, in which the Congress would participate, must function 'with full powers as a Cabinet with the Viceroy acting as constitutional head'. This was virtually a demand for the immediate acquisition of Dominion Status. The Indian Government was to be as free as the Australian Government. Sir Archibald Wavell's position would be comparable with General MacArthur's. In other words, the national independence of India, contemplated in the Draft Declaration as the outcome of post-war discussion, was to be conceded forthwith.

It had been taken for granted on the British side that the National Government, like the existing Executive Council, would operate by majority decisions and that there would be no more need than there had been in the past for the Governor-General to use his overriding power. In any case it would be harder to use it. For the new Government would be a stronger body than the Council. All its members, it was expected, except the Commander-in-Chief, would be Indians, controlling departments all of which would be more or less concerned with the conduct of the war.

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When the A I C C met at the end of April it was presented by the Working Committee with a forthright resolution. The present crisis, it declared, made it impossible for the Congress to consider

<sup>1</sup> *Statesman* 16 April 1942

<sup>2</sup> *National Herald* 24 April and 30 July 1942, *Hindustan Times* 22 and 27 April

<sup>3</sup> An illuminating account of Mr. Gandhi's attitude by a non-British observer may be found in *Journey among Warriors* (London 1943) by Miss Eve Curie, a gifted representative of the Fighting French who interviewed Mr. Gandhi while the Cripps Mission was at work. She summarised her conclusions as follows (p. 474): 'For security reasons Mr. Gandhi must have no part in the government of India during the war. The United Nations cannot win the war by pacifism.'

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<sup>2</sup> *National Herald* 24 April and 30 July 1942, *Hindustan Times* 22 and 27 April

<sup>3</sup> An illuminating account of Mr. Gandhi's attitude by a non British observer may be found in *Journey among Warriors* (London 1943) by Miss Eve Curie, a gifted representative of the Fighting French who interviewed Mr. Gandhi while the Cripps Mission was at work. She summarised her conclusions as follows (p. 474). 'For security reasons Mr. Gandhi must have no part in the government of India during the war. The United Nations cannot win the war by pacifism.'

American influence, if not American rule, added to British<sup>1</sup> America could have remained out of the war, and even now she can do so if she divests herself of the intoxication her immense wealth has produced.<sup>2</sup>

I see no difference between the Axis Powers and the Allies. All are exploiters, all resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to compass their end.<sup>3</sup>

Leave India in God's hands, or in modern parlance, to anarchy. Then all parties will fight one another like dogs or will, when real responsibility faces them, come to a reasonable agreement.<sup>4</sup>

It would be a mistake to interpret these utterances—and there were many others in the same strain—as evidence that Mr Gandhi was siding with Japan. Except, perhaps, in the last-quoted passage, it is only the 'out-and-out' pacifist talking, above the battle. When American journalists pointed out that the execution of his plan would help the Japanese, since it would put India at their mercy and bring China down, 'I had not the remotest idea', he said, 'of any such catastrophe resulting from my action',<sup>5</sup> and, as he could not 'guarantee fool-proof non-violent action to keep the Japanese at bay', he now conceded that the British and American troops might remain 'under a treaty with the Government of a free India and at the United Nations' expense for the sole purpose of repelling a Japanese attack and helping China'.<sup>6</sup> But this one concession was not so useful as it might at first sight have seemed. For, in the first place, the Allied forces would be helpless without the vigorous backing of the free Indian Government which would control communications, transport, supplies, and all the various indispensable adjuncts of modern warfare, and, secondly, Mr Gandhi insisted that the Indian Army, which he has always regarded as the tool of British imperialism, should be disbanded as soon as the free Government took over power<sup>7</sup>—a step which, if it could in fact be taken in the middle of the fighting, would completely undermine the defence of India and break the battle front wherever Indian troops were interlinked with other troops of the United Nations overseas.

Meantime Mr Gandhi had made up his mind to force the issue. When the Working Committee met on July 6, he took his usual part in its discussions and helped, no doubt, to draft the resolution which it published on July 14.<sup>8</sup> The first part of it repeated

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan* 26 April

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 17 May

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* 14 June

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 24 May and 14 June

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will be no Central Government. The people's representatives will have to construct it.'<sup>1</sup> But Mr. Gandhi—and this is the startling point—seems to have ignored the question as to what would happen in the interval, or as to how the Allied forces, without any Central Government behind them, could resist the Japanese now threatening the frontiers of Assam and Bengal.

As to the risks of widespread disorder and bloodshed involved in a mass campaign of civil disobedience, Mr. Gandhi was quite frank. He had admitted before, more than once, that he could not promise that there would be no violence, and he now admitted it again. 'If in spite of precautions', he said, 'rioting does take place, it cannot be helped.'<sup>2</sup> Nor did he attempt to soften the militant tone of the resolution. Maulana Azad, seemingly more fearful of the consequences, argued that it was not an ultimatum. Not so Mr. Gandhi. 'There is no room left for negotiation', he told the journalists. 'Either they recognise India's independence or they don't. . . . There is no question of "one more chance". After all this is open rebellion.'<sup>3</sup> In the last article he wrote before his arrest he used the words which became the slogan of the subsequent rising, 'I can but do or die'.<sup>4</sup>

This threat to raise the Hindu masses in defiance of law and order when the Japanese were at the gates of India evoked a chorus of dissent and alarm. No party other than the Congress, no politician outside its ranks, approved of it. The League, the Mahasabha, the Liberals, the Depressed Classes, the National Democrats, the Communists—all denounced it. The most effective, because most closely reasoned, protest was made privately to Mr. Gandhi by Mr. Rajagopalachari and three leading Madras Congressmen.

The withdrawal of the Government [they wrote] without simultaneous replacement by another must involve the dissolution of the State and society itself. However difficult the achievement of a Hindu-Muslim settlement may be while the British Government is here and functioning, it is essential before a demand for withdrawal can reasonably be made. . . . The party to gain immediately by the movement will be Japan.<sup>5</sup>

Meantime the Central Government held its hand. It was hoping, as it afterwards declared, that the universal condemnation of Mr.

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Mobs, sometimes thousands strong, dislocated railway lines, cut telegraph and telephone wires, and fired some hundreds of railway stations, signal-boxes, and post offices. Upwards of 150 police stations and other Government buildings were also destroyed. The campaign was most successful in the vital strategic area of Bihar. Bengal and Assam were for some time completely isolated from the rest of India, and the troops defending their frontiers cut off from their main channels of reinforcement and supply. War industries were similarly cut off from their chief supply of coal which is in Bihar.

The large-scale attack on communications was defeated by the end of August. The second phase of the campaign consisted mainly of isolated acts of sabotage and the distribution of inflammatory leaflets, but there were one or two outbreaks of destructive violence. By the end of the year the force of the rebellion was exhausted. Over 900 insurgents had been killed in the fighting.<sup>1</sup> Some 30 police and 11 soldiers lost their lives. The cost of the damage was estimated at about £1,000,000.

Congress apologists have argued that the tragedy of 1942 was not the Congress' doing, but a spontaneous popular reaction to the provocative arrest of Mr. Gandhi and his fellow patriots. Certainly there is no evidence that specific orders for a general rising were issued by the Congress authorities. Certainly, too, many of the rioters were not Congressmen, but the lawless elements—the terrorists, the criminals, the hooligans—who have always lurked in the background of Indian society. It is clear, on the other hand, that, though the campaign may have been launched unofficially and prematurely, it was a planned campaign, and that many Congressmen took part in it. In several places well-known members of the party were seen inciting and directing the work of destruction.<sup>2</sup> Yet Mr. Gandhi himself has persistently disclaimed even the slightest measure of responsibility. Writing to Lord Linlithgow early in 1943, he declared that he had 'not any conviction of error' and that 'the whole blame' for the tragedy lay with the Central Government.<sup>3</sup> The plain man, who has read what Mr. Gandhi said in the weeks preceding the outbreak and remembers the strength of his hold on the emotions of the Hindu masses, will form his own opinion.

<sup>1</sup> Aircraft were used for reconnaissance and fired on five occasions, after warning, on mobs engaged in destroying railway lines. No bombs were dropped.

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Hindu sentiment Early in 1943, he announced his intention of undergoing another fast, and on February 10 he began it. He was now seventy-three years old, and, as he rapidly lost strength, it was widely believed that the only chance of saving his life was to set him free. A wave of emotion ran through Hindu India and beyond. Perhaps the most striking incident was the conduct of three Indian members of the Central Government. They had all reproached Mr. Gandhi's policy in the previous summer, they had all joined in the unanimous decision for his arrest, but now, when their colleagues refused to yield to the moral coercion of the fast, they resigned. To the general relief the aged Mahatma survived his self-imposed ordeal. On March 2, at the end of the three weeks he had set himself, he broke his fast.

In the course of the next few months the political problem was overshadowed by an even greater tragedy than the rebellion. The mass of the people in most of eastern India subsists mainly on rice. The Japanese occupation of Burma had cut off the chief supply of imported rice, but the effect of that was far outweighed by the poor yield of the home crop in the winter of 1942-3. Unfortunately this coincided with the disturbances caused by a complex of war-conditions in the normal operation of the grain market throughout India. Many districts were threatened with food shortage in the following spring, but, though all of them suffered from more or less grave scarcity and hardship, the old spectre of real famine was kept at bay except in Bengal. In that Province, with a population of over sixty millions, the shortage was aggravated by a catastrophe of nature. In a large and fertile area a violent cyclone and a tidal wave overwhelmed the crops, destroyed such stocks of food as the countryfolk had kept in reserve, and rendered many of them homeless and destitute. Still more disastrous was the steep rise in prices. Many Bengali producers and dealers made high profits, but many of the poorer rural population could not pay the prices now demanded for their food.<sup>1</sup> In April a flood of refugees came pouring into Calcutta, penniless and foodless. Grain was hurriedly dispatched from more favoured parts of India and relief work was begun, but not in time to save many thousands from death by starvation and exposure in the streets. Meanwhile, though, owing to the lack of good communications, it was not fully realised at the time, the situation in many country districts was even worse. In the end the total death-roll from the

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to save life whatever constitutional issues might have been involved. It is only fair to remember that the war had put an increasing strain on the Centre, but the sequel suggests that it could have done more than it did. In October 1943, Lord Wavell succeeded Lord Linlithgow as Governor-General, and he at once made intervention effective by obtaining the assistance of the military forces on the spot. The last stage of the calamity was greatly alleviated by the help they gave in the transport of supplies and in checking the spread of disease.

The famine was a grim reminder that for the mass of the Indian people the economic problem was more directly and vitally urgent than the political problem, and the lesson was driven home by the publication of the results of the census held in 1941. The population, it appeared, was still growing fast. Nearly five million more births were occurring every year than deaths. Since so large a portion of the existing population was already living on the margin of subsistence, what was going to happen in five or ten or twenty years' time? Was not India clearly heading for a catastrophe which would dwarf what had happened in Bengal? That practical-minded Indians had realised the appalling gravity of these questions was shown by the publication, early in 1944, of *A Plan of Economic Development for India*, soon popularly known as the 'Bombay Plan'. It was the joint production of eight eminent industrialists and financiers, including four members of the famous Tata firm,<sup>1</sup> three directors of the Reserve Bank of India, and Mr G. D. Birla, the chief supporter of the Congress Party in the Indian business world. Their proposals must be ranked among the boldest in this age of bold economic planning. Their objective, they declared, was 'to bring about a doubling of the present *per capita* income within a period of fifteen years'. Allowing for the growth of population, that would mean 'the trebling of the present aggregate national income'. 'To achieve this increase, we propose that the plan should be so organised as to raise the net output of agriculture to a little over twice its present figure, and that of industry, including both large and small industries, to approximately five times the present output'.<sup>2</sup> To finance the scheme, which covered the extension of such social services as health and education as well as the improvement of agriculture and the expansion of industry, the capital to be raised would be roughly £7,500 millions.

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This ought, of course, to have implied a corresponding development in the political field. It was obvious, in the first place, that economic planning must be based on the conditions in all parts of India and that it required for its success the greatest possible measure of co-operation throughout the country. The Bombay planners, indeed, frankly based their scheme on the assumption that all India would be united in a Federation and that the jurisdiction of the Federal Government 'in economic matters' would extend through all the Provinces and States. 'No development of the kind we have proposed will be feasible except on the basis of a central directing authority which enjoys sufficient popular support and possesses the requisite powers.'<sup>1</sup> The Government proposals, likewise, for a great increase in centralised control seemed to imply the formation of a single Federal Centre with wide powers. But, in the existing state of Hindu-Moslem tension and in face of the League's demand for Pakistan, was it reasonable to expect that such a Centre could be agreed on? And, until at least the main principles of a constitutional settlement were determined, until at any rate it was known whether India was to constitute a single federated sovereign State or to be partitioned into two or more such States, were not the planners building castles in the air? These considerations applied as much to official as to unofficial planning, and as regards the former there was a further difficulty. To what lengths could the Government go in working out plans for the future? How far could it commit itself? They must be mainly long-term plans. If the hopes of an early settlement were realised, the existing Government would not be responsible for carrying them out.

It was with such thoughts, no doubt, in mind that Lord Wavell, in the speech mentioned above, stressed the need for unity and co-operation. Speaking, as he said, 'frankly and bluntly as I have been taught to speak as a soldier', he reaffirmed the natural unity of India. 'No man', he said, 'can alter geography'; and he reminded his audience that within natural geographical units elsewhere—in Britain, in Canada, in Switzerland—peoples of different nationality, of different race and faith and culture, had continued to live together. Ireland, on the other hand, has 'a sort of Pakistan'. There was a wealth of precedents, in fact, for Indian constitutionalists to study; and any authoritative body that was set up

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the States the option of joining in the Union or staying out, they had recognised the facts 'inherent in the situation as it has developed out of history' To reject those proposals was a blunder, and they ought to be accepted now, both for the formation of an interim National Government and for the drafting of the new constitution 'In 1919 and again in 1930, we<sup>1</sup> refused our co-operation in the making of the constitution, and, though this refusal may have helped to vindicate national self-respect, it did not help in a positive way, but left constructive work to reactionary elements It will be sad if that mistake is repeated for a third time'<sup>2</sup>

But Mr Rajagopalachari still stood alone 'No more now than at any time since his breach with Mr Gandhi and resignation from the Congress did he obtain any backing from within its ranks It seems probable that many Congressmen regretted in their hearts the course to which Mr Gandhi had committed the whole party in 1942, but they were, if anything, less willing than they had been then to question his authority, now that they were barred from all communication with him Nor, if they had known what he was thinking, would they have been encouraged to listen to Mr Rajagopalachari From time to time Mr Gandhi was writing to Lord Wavell as he had written to Lord Linlithgow, and, when the correspondence was published in June 1944, it was clear to all the world that he had not so far budged an inch from the position he had taken up in 1942 He continued to argue that the fateful resolution was framed to serve the interests not only of India but of Britain and the United Nations and that the blame for the subsequent disorder and bloodshed lay entirely on the Government To Lord Wavell's plea for co-operation in the existing administration, Central and Provincial, or, failing that, at least in the discussion of the problems of the future, his response amounted to a flat refusal Co-operation, he wrote, required equality and mutual trust between the parties Both were wanting Nor had Congressmen any faith in the Government's competence 'to ensure India's future good'. There was no sign in these letters of a change of attitude, of a more constructive or conciliatory policy than 'Quit India' He allowed himself, indeed, to coin another of those extravagant phrases which had done so much harm in 1942 Forgetting, it would seem, that responsible parliamentary government was operating in six of the eleven Provinces and might be operating in them all if the Congress had so wished—forgetting, too, that

<sup>1</sup> 'We' can only mean the Congress here

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 28

the States the option of joining in the Union or staying out, they had recognised the facts 'inherent in the situation as it has developed out of history'. To reject those proposals was a blunder, and they ought to be accepted now, both for the formation of an interim National Government and for the drafting of the new constitution. 'In 1919 and again in 1930, we<sup>1</sup> refused our co-operation in the making of the constitution, and, though this refusal may have helped to vindicate national self-respect, it did not help in a positive way, but left constructive work to reactionary elements. It will be sad if that mistake is repeated for a third time.'<sup>2</sup>

But Mr. Rajagopalachari still stood alone. 'No more now than at any time since his breach with Mr. Gandhi and resignation from the Congress did he obtain any backing from within its ranks. It seems probable that many Congressmen regretted in their hearts the course to which Mr. Gandhi had committed the whole party in 1942; but they were, if anything, less willing than they had been then to question his authority, now that they were barred from all communication with him. Nor, if they had known what he was thinking, would they have been encouraged to listen to Mr. Rajagopalachari. From time to time Mr. Gandhi was writing to Lord Wavell as he had written to Lord Linlithgow, and, when the correspondence was published in June 1944, it was clear to all the world that he had not so far budged an inch from the position he had taken up in 1942. He continued to argue that the fateful resolution was framed to serve the interests not only of India but of Britain and the United Nations and that the blame for the subsequent disorder and bloodshed lay entirely on the Government. To Lord Wavell's plea for co-operation in the existing administration, Central and Provincial, or, failing that, at least in the discussion of the problems of the future, his response amounted to a flat refusal. Co-operation, he wrote, required equality and mutual trust between the parties. Both were wanting. Nor had Congressmen any faith in the Government's competence 'to ensure India's future good'. There was no sign in these letters of a change of attitude, of a more constructive or conciliatory policy than 'Quit India'. He allowed himself, indeed, to coin another of those extravagant phrases which had done so much harm in 1942. Forgetting, it would seem, that responsible parliamentary government was operating in six of the eleven Provinces and might be operating in them all if the Congress had so wished—forgetting, too, that

<sup>1</sup> 'We' can only mean the Congress here.      <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

coalition Government with Sikh and Hindu members, on the maintenance of which the communal peace of the Province depended. Mr Jinnah's attack continued till at last, in June 1944, the Premier was expelled from the League—an incident which recalled Mr Rajagopalachari's virtual expulsion from the Congress—and its electoral support of the Unionist Party withdrawn. That in itself, however, was a sign of Mr Jinnah's failure. He had certainly shaken the Government, but he had not brought it down.

Meantime, his attitude to the major problem of India's future was quite unchanged. The Moslem-majority Provinces must have Pakistan, he repeated again and again, and Pakistan meant sheer Partition with no link left between the parts save such voluntary agreements as might be concluded between wholly independent sovereign states. If Britain were honest, she would admit the necessity of this division of India. He had criticised the Cripps proposals because they conceded only the principle of Pakistan and did not make its realisation a condition of the settlement. At a Session of the League, at the end of 1943, he went further. Partition, he said, should not be left to the decision of the Indian parties. The British Government should put it through. Then, and only then, it would be able to transfer power to a free Pakistan and a free Hindustan. And he matched the Congress' 'Quit India' with a new slogan for the League 'Divide and Quit'.<sup>1</sup> That in effect was the only answer he gave some weeks later to Lord Wavell's appeal for co-operation. He denounced his pointed reference to geography as deliberately provocative, and, echoing the language so often used by Congress spokesmen, he declared that the British Government's demand for a unity which it knew to be unobtainable was merely a device for maintaining its 'imperialistic stranglehold' on India.<sup>2</sup> Mr Jinnah, in fact, seemed to have closed his mind, as obstinately as Mr Gandhi, to the necessity of the Hindu-Moslem problem being solved by agreement between Hindus and Moslems. Both of them were demanding that the British Government should deal with it for them, and by methods that were equally impracticable. 'Divide and Quit' meant imposing Partition by force. 'Quit India' meant leaving her peoples to fight it out.

## 2 MR GANDHI AND MR JINNAH

While Indian politics remained in the grip of a seemingly unbreakable deadlock, the external situation was being rapidly

<sup>1</sup> *Times of India* 27 December 1943      <sup>2</sup> *Reuter*, Bombay, 11 March 1944

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India's policy was now out of date. At previous crises he had shown no hesitation in declaring his opinion and inducing his colleagues sooner or later to adopt it. Now he was more diffident. 'What can I do?' he said: 'I cannot withdraw the "August Resolution"', since, it was explained, it could only be withdrawn by the A.I.C.C. who had passed it.<sup>1</sup> 'Even if I was quite well,' he wrote to Lord Wavell, 'I could do little or nothing unless I know the mind of the Working Committee of Congress.'<sup>2</sup> A few weeks later Mr. Gandhi took a bolder line. He now told Lord Wavell that he would advise the Working Committee that in the changed situation civil disobedience was no longer practicable and that the Congress ought now to co-operate fully in the war effort—on two conditions. First, the independence of India must be immediately declared. Second, a National Government must be formed at the Centre, responsible to the Central Assembly and in control of all matters except military operations during the war.<sup>3</sup> This second demand was virtually identical with the ultimatum which had brought the Cripps Mission to an end, and Mr. Gandhi can scarcely have supposed that it could be accepted.

But, if he was unwilling to commit himself to a real change of policy towards the Government, he was ready, it seemed, to renew the attempts he had made, on the eve of the rebellion, to persuade the Moslem League to join forces with the Congress.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Mr. Jinnah, written in 1943, he had proposed that they should meet. 'Why should not both you and I approach the great question of communal unity as men determined on finding a common solution?'<sup>5</sup> The Government's decision to allow Mr. Gandhi to take no part in politics during his detention had precluded the delivery of this letter, and its contents were only known to Mr. Jinnah when, shortly after his release, Mr. Gandhi authorised its publication. Mr. Jinnah made no comment. In July, at about the same time as his new approach to Lord Wavell, Mr. Gandhi renewed his request for a meeting, and now Mr. Jinnah replied inviting him to his house at Bombay in August.<sup>6</sup> They met on September 9.<sup>7</sup>

If these two men could have re-established a Congress-League accord and could then have persuaded their respective parties to accept it, the major obstacle to the swift and complete emancipa-

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matters of common concern might be dealt with by a joint board of control—that there could be no matters of common concern to two separate sovereign states. And, if the kind of settlement proposed was thus quite unacceptable to Mr. Jinnah, so was the method and the timing for bringing it about. The actual wording of the formula quoted above did not make it clear whether the decision on Partition should be made, and, if in favour of it, put into effect, before or after the full transfer of power from the British to an Indian Government. Whatever Mr. Rajagopalachari's interpretation may have been, there was no doubt about Mr. Gandhi's. He had not abandoned his 'cart-before-the-horse' technique. He continued to insist that Hindu-Moslem unity was 'not to be achieved without the foreign ruling power being ousted'. Any pact concluded now would be implemented in the constitution to be framed 'by the Provisional Government contemplated in the formula or by an authority specially set up by it *after British power is withdrawn*'—a reversion, in fact, to the sort of procedure contemplated in the 'Quit India' resolutions of 1942. Even if the kind of Pakistan offered him had been acceptable, Mr. Jinnah was bound to reject this method of bringing it into being. He had always made it plain that the 'division' must precede the 'quitting'.<sup>1</sup>

In Hindu circles the breakdown of the negotiations was regarded with mixed feelings. The more moderate-minded regretted, no doubt, that yet another attempt at a Hindu-Moslem *entente* had failed. But there were many Hindus—and not only in the ranks of the uncompromising Mahasabha—who heard of the breakdown with relief, so anxious were they lest their great leader should commit himself to the 'vivisection of Mother India'. The spokesmen of the League, for their part, rejoiced that the Moslems had been saved from falling into yet another Hindu trap. Yet it could not be said that the prospects of an ultimate Hindu-Moslem settlement had been worsened by the conference. The gulf was no wider. It had narrowed, indeed, in one important respect. Not so very long ago, Mr. Gandhi had claimed that the Congress represented all the peoples and communities of India and was entitled to 'take delivery' of the government without prior agreement with any other party.<sup>2</sup> Now he had at last admitted 'the preponderating influence and position of the Moslem League' in Moslem politics and was prepared to discuss with its leader a programme of

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more attractive to the League whose spokesmen had long been accustomed to denounce the Liberals as players of Mr. Gandhi's game, all the more dangerous to the Moslem cause because of their seeming aloofness from the Congress. In any case Mr. Jinnah's reaction was almost a matter of course. When Sir Tej, having now formed his 'Conciliation Committee' (as it was presently called), asked him for an interview 'in order to obtain clarification on the practical aspects of the problem' of Pakistan, he replied that he could not recognise the Non-Party Conference or its Committee and therefore could not do what he was asked. Sir Tej, thereupon, announced that his Committee would proceed with its inquiry on the basis of the League's resolutions, Mr. Jinnah's speeches and letters and other relevant material. Equally inevitable was Sir Tej's difficulty as to the Moslem representatives on his Committee. He eventually obtained the services of five in a total membership of twenty-nine; but none of them was an outstanding personality in the Moslem community. Discouraging, too, was the failure to secure the co-operation of Dr. Ambedkar, the acknowledged leader of the Scheduled Castes. The two *harijans* appointed on the Committee had little standing. This weakness in the representation of the two greatest minorities was accentuated by the strength of the Hindu quota which included Mr. Jayakar and Mr. N. R. Sarkar. The Central Government's promised sympathy with any authoritative effort to tackle the constitutional problem was duly forthcoming: the information and statistics asked for were promptly supplied. And the comprehensive and straightforward questionnaire, drafted at the end of December for circulation to all parties, was proof that the Committee knew its way about the complex constitutional field. It put the right questions, and it put them plainly. Whatever the upshot might be, Sir Tej and his colleagues were evidently intending to do what—it had long seemed obvious—had to be done if ever the deadlock was to be broken. The real facts and issues were to be examined and discussed in India by Indians.<sup>1</sup>

While the Committee was at work during the early months of 1945, the pattern of Indian politics was shifting. Though most of its leaders were still in detention, the Congress had become more active and seemed to be regaining some of the ground it had lost before and after the rebellion. It had abandoned its boycott of the Central Assembly in the previous November, and in the course

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recovery of the Province from the worst disaster it had suffered for generations past. But nothing of that sort happened. On the contrary, party faction had never been so violent and irresponsible. In order to prevent the passage of a bill dealing with secondary education—a highly controversial question because of its communal implications—the Opposition drowned debate in disorder. Once an attempt was made to carry off the mace. The deadlock brought about by this travesty of parliamentary government was only ended by the prorogation of the session by the Governor (Mr R G Casey). When the Assembly met again, the proceedings were more orderly, and the Ministry was threatened not so much by the violence of the Opposition as by intrigue and dissension within the ranks of its own supporters. At the end of March (1945), a group of them crossed the floor of the house and Ministers were defeated. Thereupon, the Governor, confronted with the necessity of securing supply for the next financial year by April 1, and with the certainty that no stable Ministry could be constituted took over the government under Section 93<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time a similar situation had developed in Sind. There, too, the 'Moslem League Ministry' was defeated owing to discord among its supporters, but in this case, after a vigorous personal intervention by Mr Jinnah, a new 'League Ministry' was formed under the previous Premier, Sir G H Hidayatullah. This demonstration of Mr Jinnah's authority scarcely compensated for the setbacks which the League had suffered in the N W F P and Bengal, but it was difficult to determine to what extent those setbacks affected its position and prospects as a whole. The results of the by elections during the last two years had been as favourable as before. Of the 11 elections to Moslem seats in the Provinces from the middle of 1943 to the middle of 1945 the League won 8, independent Moslems 3, Congress Moslems none. All four of the elections to the Central Legislature were won by the League.<sup>1</sup> Naturally enough, Mr Jinnah claimed that this trend would be confirmed if general elections were held for all the Legislatures and meantime he refused to make the slightest change of front.

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Meantime, public opinion in Britain was becoming increasingly impatient with the long protraction of the deadlock. It had welcomed the British Government's undertaking in 1942 to convoke a constitutional convention immediately after the war and to acquiesce in any settlement acceptable to the major Indian parties and conformable with British obligations. Nor had it been questioned at that time that it was no longer Britain's business to take a hand in constitution-making, that it was now for the Indians alone to frame their own system of government as the peoples of the Dominions had framed theirs. That this would prove a harder task in India than it had in the Dominions had been plain enough, but it had been widely hoped that the difficulties and dissensions would somehow be overcome when Indian patriots of all communities and parties realised that only by a settlement of some sort could they attain full freedom. But three years had passed since the Cripps Mission, and the prospects of agreement between the main political forces in India seemed no brighter now than they did then. The appointment of the Conciliation Committee was a hopeful sign, but it was feared that the chances of its success were gravely impaired by its inadequate representation of the great minorities. Thus the desire which the British people as a whole had clearly manifested since the outset of the war to see India attaining the same free status as the Dominions as soon as the fighting was over seemed to have been thwarted. The German war, at any rate, was evidently nearing its end, and to all appearance the Japanese war likewise would be ended with the Indian problem still unsolved. Hence the sense of frustration, so long prevalent in India, began to spread to Britain. Even those who had been most sympathetic with Indian nationalism began to wonder whether in fact it was capable of realising its nationhood unaided; and the question was raised in Parliament and in the press whether an attitude of benevolent aloofness was still the right attitude for Britain. Ought not the British Government, it was asked, to do something to break the deadlock? If legislation were required, ought not Parliament, still ultimately responsible for the welfare of India, to revoke its self-denying ordinance? If such questions remained unanswered, it was mainly because it was

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be allotted to the Congress, forty per cent to the League, and twenty per cent to the other minority parties,<sup>1</sup> and the Conciliation Committee's recommendation that the restored Provincial Ministries should be coalitions was supported by the Congress press.

Mr Gandhi's contribution to the discussion was not very positive or precise. Freedom, he said, might be won 'without parliamentary programmes and even without civil disobedience'.<sup>2</sup> Mr Jinnah's contribution was wholly negative. In a statement to the press he repudiated the Conciliation Committee's proposals outright. 'They are nothing but handmaids of the Congress,' he said, 'and have played and are playing to the tune of Mr Gandhi'.<sup>3</sup> It was thought, however, that he might be willing to consider the League's representation in an 'Indianised' Council on the 40-40-20 basis, since Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, the deputy-leader of the League, was known to have discussed it with Mr Bhulabhai Desai. But ever since the question was first raised in 1940 Mr Jinnah has been cautious about accepting office at the Centre. He has evidently thought that it might prejudice the prospects of Pakistan to share in the working of the old unitary machine, and, even on its existing legal basis, he has always scouted the suggestion, now hinted at by the Conciliation Committee and expressly advocated by the Congress newspapers, that an interim 'Indianised' Council might be responsible *de facto*—it could not be *de jure* without a basic change in the law—to the old Central Assembly in which the Hindus possess a substantial majority. In other words, Mr Jinnah may have been willing to contemplate a change in personnel but not in power. The latter, he would have said, is Mr Gandhi's 'cart-before-the-horse' policy.

#### 4 THE SIMLA CONFERENCE

In Britain, meanwhile, the discussion of the Indian problem had been thrown into the background by the magnitude of current events in the West—the last phase of the war in Germany, the death of President Roosevelt, the preparations for San Francisco. But in distant India the possibility of ending the long deadlock was canvassed with a growing excitement which was further stimulated by Lord Wavell's visit to London towards the end of March and the official admission that political as well as military problems were to be discussed. Most of the Indian leaders gave voice and

<sup>1</sup> *The Times* 17 May 1945. <sup>2</sup> Reuter Bombay, 31 March 1945.

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be allotted to the Congress, forty per cent to the League, and twenty per cent to the other minority parties,<sup>1</sup> and the Conciliation Committee's recommendation that the restored Provincial Ministries should be coalitions was supported by the Congress press.

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economic development (2) To that end it is proposed to reconstitute the Central Executive Council so that all its members, except the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, would be Indian political leaders,<sup>1</sup> the Caste Hindus<sup>2</sup> and the Moslems being equally represented. The portfolio of External Affairs (except for frontier and tribal matters) would be transferred from the Governor-General to an Indian member of the Council, and fully accredited persons would be appointed to represent India abroad. (3) In furtherance of this plan Lord Wavell will call a conference of party leaders and Provincial Premiers and ex-Premiers who will be asked to submit to him lists of names from which he can select the personnel of the new Council. (4) Co-operation at the Centre will doubtless make possible the resumption of responsible government in the 'Section 93 Provinces', on the basis, it may be hoped, of coalitions of the main parties. (5) These proposals embody, in the British Government's opinion, 'the utmost progress practicable within the present constitution', and none of them 'will in any way prejudice or prejudge the essential form of the future permanent constitution or constitutions for India'.

In explaining these proposals to the House of Commons,<sup>3</sup> Mr Amery stated that the eight members of the Congress Working Committee who were still in custody were to be released,<sup>4</sup> and he also announced that the Government intended to make an important administrative change. The Governor-General, he pointed out, might possibly be embarrassed on occasion by his 'dual position of being concerned as head of the Government of India with the defence of Indian interests and at the same time of representing the specific material interests of this country'. It had been decided, therefore, to appoint a British High Commissioner in India to negotiate on the British Government's behalf in such matters—one more proof of the measure of self-government already attained by India.

It was as a means not only of breaking the existing deadlock

<sup>1</sup> This as explained in the statement, would require a small amendment of the Ninth Schedule to the Act of 1935 which requires that not less than three members of the Council should have had at least ten years' service under the Crown in India.

<sup>2</sup> The use of this term was vehemently denounced by Mr Gandhi who has always sought to minimise the distinction between the 'outcastes' (*harijans*) and the rest of the Hindu community but the term has long been in common use to describe those Hindus who are not 'outcastes'.

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—the Presidents of the Congress and the League, the Congress Leader and the League Deputy-Leader in the Central Assembly (Mr Bhulabhai Desai and Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan), the Congress and League Leaders in the Council of State, the Leaders of the Nationalist Party and of the European group in the Assembly, and one representative of the Scheduled Castes and one of the Sikhs. The preponderance of the Congress and the League in this list was manifest, and the Indian Christians and the Anglo-Indians protested against their exclusion<sup>1</sup>. But, apart from the desirability of keeping the personnel as small as possible, it was a realistic selection, for it had long been evident that there would be no serious obstacle to a general settlement if only the Congress and the League agreed.

In the short speech with which Lord Wavell opened the Conference, he reaffirmed his hope that its outcome would pave the way to a final solution of the complex constitutional problem. 'You must accept my leadership for the present. Until there is some agreed change in the constitution, I am responsible to His Majesty's Government for the good government and welfare of India. I ask you to believe in me as a sincere friend of India.'<sup>2</sup>

Opinion at the outset was optimistic, and not, perhaps, without reason. For the great party which had done most to prevent agreement in the past was now bent, it seemed, on obtaining it. This was a striking change of front. For the 'Wavell Offer' was essentially the same as the interim proposals of the 'Cripps Offer', and acceptance of it would imply that the Congress was now willing to share in the Central Government without a basic change in the existing constitution and to take its full part in the war effort—the two points on which the rupture had occurred in 1942. It would mean, in fact, that the Congress leaders now concurred with the general opinion that the 'Quit India' policy was a mistake and were seeking to recover the ground they had lost thereby in the judgment of their fellow countrymen and of the world at large.<sup>3</sup> Mr Rajagopalachari claimed, indeed, during the session of the Conference, that 'goodwill and mutual trust' between the Congress and the British people had been 'to a large extent' restored.<sup>4</sup> But,

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India after the failure of the Conference Do not any of you be discouraged by this set back We shall overcome our difficulties in the end The future greatness of India is not in doubt

It was too much, perhaps, to expect that there would be no recriminations Hindu newspapers pinned the responsibility for the breakdown on Mr Jinnah or on Lord Wavell for not overriding Mr Jinnah 'By allowing the right to dictate success or failure', said the *Hindustan Times*, 'Lord Wavell has nullified all his previous firmness and tact A National Government without the League need not and should not involve any injury to the Muslim community The only course is to leave the League alone for the present and allow the good sense of the Muslim community to bring pressure upon it to change its ways'<sup>1</sup> Moslem newspapers were equally uncompromising, and, just as the Congress leaders, after rejecting the 'Cripps Offer', had asserted that it was a cynical plot and a 'salted mine',<sup>2</sup> so now Mr Jinnah declared that 'on the final examination and analysis of the Wavell Plan we found that it was a snare'<sup>3</sup> But, though Mr Jinnah would thus seemingly admit the chief share of responsibility for the breakdown of the Conference, it does not follow that his case was so weak, his intransigence so unreasonable, as to have made it possible for Lord Wavell to override it His case was frankly stated to the press, both during and after the Conference, and impartial students of Indian politics must judge it on its merits In sum it was as follows

(1) The fact that the Moslem League is backed by the great majority of Indian Moslems is proved by the number of Moslem seats it holds in the Legislatures and by the consistent results of by-elections (2) The policy of the League is Pakistan or the Partition of India Since 1940, therefore, the League had refused to join a Central Government unless the British Government promised Partition after the war and unless the Moslems, being a separate nation, were given half the seats on the Council (3) The League could not be expected to waive the first of these conditions if the second were also rejected, and it was now proposed that beside the equal quotas allotted to the Moslems and the Caste Hindus, a number of seats should be filled by representatives of other communities<sup>4</sup> Thus the Moslems would be in a minority (4) While those other communities—the Scheduled Castes, for

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which it has been suspended; but it must be remembered that Congress leaders have pointed out the difficulty of operating responsible government in the Provinces while government is not responsible at the Centre and that Mr. Jinnab has repeatedly declared that he would never acquiesce in the return to office of 'pure' Congress Ministries in the Congress-majority Provinces. But, if coalition Ministries can be formed—and it has been suggested more than once in Congress circles that this is the right policy—the way will be clear for devising and convoking a Constitutional Convention.

It was mainly, no doubt, to discuss the question of this Convention with the new Labour Government that Lord Wavell paid a second visit to London at the end of August. The upshot of it was made known, soon after his return to Delhi, in a broadcast to the Indian people (September 19).<sup>1</sup> He had been authorised, he said, immediately after the elections, to discuss with representatives of the new Provincial Assemblies whether the proposals of 1945 for the setting-up of a constitution-making body were acceptable<sup>2</sup> or whether some alternative plan might be preferred, and also to discuss with representatives of the Indian States how they can best play their part. The British Government on its side would consider forthwith the content of the treaty which, as stated in 1942, would have to be concluded between Britain and India.<sup>3</sup> He would also, after the elections, make another attempt to reconstitute his Executive Council. He concluded the broadcast with an assurance of the British people's desire 'to help India which has given us so much help in winning the war', and with an appeal to Indians 'to show that they have the wisdom, faith, and courage to determine in what way they can best reconcile their differences, and how their country can be governed by Indians for Indians'.

So far, so good, but, in view of all that has happened in recent years, what chance is there, it may be asked, that Indian discussion will result in Indian agreement? And would it not help to bring about agreement, it has been said, if the British Government were to impose a time-limit? If it pledged itself to abdicate, to surrender all its remaining powers, at a certain date—at the end of

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enable the people of India to govern themselves as fully as any other people in the world <sup>1</sup>

It does not follow that the British people are disinterested. The future of India, it need hardly be said, cannot be a matter of indifference to those who have been so closely concerned with her past. Nor is it only a question of sentiment or of material considerations: the discharge of British obligations is an essential factor in the final settlement. For these and many other reasons a larger section of the British public is interested in the Indian problem than at any time within living memory. They will closely watch developments in India, and they will be anxious to do anything they can to help India to her freedom. And it seems just possible that there might ultimately be something they could do. If the worst comes to the worst, if in the end the Indian leaders fail to agree, or if they find themselves impelled towards a decision which they feel in their hearts to be wrong, is it not conceivable that in the last resort they might be willing at least to consider such constructive suggestions as might be tendered by those neutrals who know and care more about India than any one else in the outer world. The British Government cannot *impose*, but it could, at need, *propose* a settlement.

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Partition would not be one clean cut. The two Moslem majority areas in north-west and north east India might be linked in one federal system, but they would be separated from each other by over 700 miles of Hindu majority territory. Nor can it be assumed that the process of disruption would stop there. Already a movement is afoot in Madras for establishing an independent Dravidian state in the south, and it seems probable that some at least of the leading Indian Princes, while willing to share in a union of all India, would refuse to be incorporated in any lesser unit and demand an independent status of their own.

Set against such a fragmentation of India the merits of political unity seem obvious enough.

(1) It is the natural response to physical conditions. Mountains and the sea cut off India from the rest of the world, but not the various parts of India from one another. In sharp and significant contrast with Europe, the coastline of India is remarkably unbroken, and the only natural barrier inside it is easily surmountable by modern transport.

(2) Union means security. It enables India to mobilise all her resources for the common defence of her common frontiers against aggression from without. Within, there can be no war save civil war. Union, imposed by the British Raj, rescued India from centuries of invasion and internal strife. For nearly another century it has saved her from suffering the fate of war-ridden Europe; it gives her now a far greater measure of stability and security than Europe can hope to attain for many years to come.

(3) *Union similarly reflects the natural economic unity of India.* British India has long constituted one of the greatest free trade areas in the world. If the Indian States were linked with it in a new form of union, the whole sub-continent would be safeguarded against the economic nationalism which inflamed and impoverished Europe before 1939.

(4) Union involves intercommunal collaboration in its service, and it may well be that it is only by the communal leaders and parties thus working together in a common field that the old antagonisms and suspicions can be blunted and in course of time dissolved.

(5) Union, finally, would enable India to take the place in world society to which she is entitled by her size, her material and moral resources, and her historical and cultural traditions. A United

Partition would not be one clean cut. The two Moslem majority areas in north-west and north east India might be linked in one federal system, but they would be separated from each other by over 700 miles of Hindu majority territory. Nor can it be assumed that the process of disruption would stop there. Already a movement is afoot in Madras for establishing an independent Dravidian state in the south, and it seems probable that some at least of the leading Indian Princes, while willing to share in a union of all India, would refuse to be incorporated in any lesser unit and demand an independent status of their own.

Set against such a fragmentation of India the merits of political unity seem obvious enough.

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might be treated, would be essentially Moslem. Their governments, their civil and military services, their educational systems, would be predominantly Moslem. They would be able to ensure the maximum of economic development free from the stranglehold of Hindu financiers and industrialists. Last but not least, Partition would dispel the dread that lurks in Moslem minds lest, in the slow course of time, their faith itself might be gradually infected and overgrown by Hinduism.

(5) Partition would not only strengthen and safeguard the Moslems in their homelands. The existence of a powerful Moslem State would also improve the standing and enhance the self-respect of the Moslem minorities who would perforce be left outside its borders, encompassed by Hindus. It would help them to claim and obtain their rights and to resist the moral pressure of Hinduism.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulties and drawbacks of Partition may be summarised as follows

(1) The demarcation of the frontiers would be a serious and thorny problem for both the two projected Moslem States. The bulk of the Sikh community is located in the Punjab and in the Punjab States, and the Sikh reaction to the prospect of a Moslem Raj in Pakistan closely corresponds to the Moslem reaction to the prospect of a Hindu Raj in an undivided India. But the exclusion of the Sikhs from Pakistan presents an almost insoluble administrative problem and would greatly impair its military and economic strength.<sup>2</sup> In North-east India the problem of delimitation would be scarcely easier. The Moslems number about sixty per cent of the population of the area as a whole, but only about thirty four per cent in Assam. Can Assam's assent to inclusion in a Moslem State be taken for granted? It is suggested, again, that the Hindu-majority districts of western Bengal might be transferred to the adjacent Hindu State, but might not that provoke a similar outburst of Bengali patriotism among the Hindus as that which greeted the partition of the Province in 1905 and led to its undoing in 1911? What, finally, is to happen to Calcutta—a city which contains three times as many Hindus as Moslems and whose great commercial and cultural interests are dominantly Hindu? It has long been a focus of communal antagonism. Can it be quietly cut

<sup>1</sup> See *Report* Part III pp 79-80

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with China or the Powers of the West, but with Iran or Burma or Siam.

Those are formidable drawbacks, and yet it seems more than probable that the great majority of the Moslems in their present mood would choose to face them and endure them rather than submit to a Hindu Raj in any shape or form. It behoves, then, all those who care for India's welfare—and indeed for the welfare of the world-society of which India is an inseparable part—to think, and think again, whether some constitutional system might not be devised which would meet the practical and emotional needs of the Moslems without completely shattering the unity of India.

## 2. THE PROVINCES

To deal first with the Provinces is not to prejudge the problem of the Centre. Whether India is partitioned or not, the Provinces, possibly with some local adjustments of their frontiers, will remain as basic territorial units of administration. It is only the scope of their autonomy that affects the Central problem; and the question to be examined in this section is not what a Province's powers should be but how they should be exercised. This question has been at least as much discussed in India, both publicly and behind the scenes, as the Central question, especially with regard to the possible restoration of responsible government in the 'Section 93 Provinces'; and, now that opinions about it have begun to settle, a stretch of common ground is seen to be taking shape.

Of the proposals that have so far been made, the following are the most important.

(1) The constitution should contain a declaration of fundamental rights applying to the Central and Provincial field alike, and guaranteeing to communities and individuals the freedoms which must be respected in any modern civilised society. These rights should be so defined as to facilitate as far as possible their maintenance in the courts.

(2) Since the surest safeguard of the peace of India will be the sovereignty of the law, the constitution must be regarded as peculiarly sacrosanct and permanent. It should be subject to amendment only by special processes and by special majorities.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Conciliation Committee recommended that the constitution should be subject to amendment only by the vote of at least two-thirds of each chamber of the Central Legislature and of the Legislature of each unit of the Union.

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the representation given to Hindus (other than Scheduled Castes) in spite of the great disparity in their respective population strength.<sup>1</sup> It was also recommended that the Central Executive should be a composite or coalition Cabinet reflecting the strength of the communities in the Legislature. These proposals constituted on the face of it a remarkable concession. The idea of a communal settlement at the Centre on the basis of 40-40-20 was, it is true, already in the air. But Mr Bhulabhai Desai's proposals dealt only with an interim arrangement, whereas the Committee was here concerned with the permanent constitution. Nor did its recommendations merely 'lie on the table', an expression of opinion by Liberals who had small responsibility and commanded virtually no votes. They were at once accepted and applauded by the Congress press. 'The Committee,' said the *Hindustan Times*, 'has evolved an alternative to the demand for Pakistan which should be acceptable to all reasonable Muslims.'<sup>2</sup>

This issue was, as has been seen, discussed at Simla, and it would be evidence again that the deadlock was not quite so stiff as it had been if Mr Jinnah was willing at least to consider the construction of a Council in which the Moslem quota would be less than fifty per cent. But that is uncertain, and in any case it was only with regard to a temporary arrangement. For the future Mr Jinnah stood firm for Pakistan.

It must be remembered that, at Simla and on other occasions, Hindu Moslem parity has been discussed with reference to a Centre for British India only. If all India is to form one Union, what about the representation of the Indian States? Since the great majority of their Rulers are Hindus and since the Hindu quota of their aggregate population is nearly sixty per cent. as against a Moslem quota of about thirteen per cent., would not their junction with British India at the Centre upset the communal balance? This difficulty, however, might not prove to be insuperable. If the Princes are bent on preserving the unity of India, would they not be willing to defy the logic of arithmetic and adjust their representation at the Centre to that of British India if this should prove to be essential in order to avoid a Hindu Raj and so prevent Partition?

It would seem, then, that in the Central field also, though the problem is far knottier there than in the Provinces, the deadlock has perceptibly begun to loosen. It may be worth considering

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Assembly would be elected on a Provincial basis, preferably indirectly by the Provincial Legislatures—just as the States' members would be appointed on a State basis—and, secondly, that, when they came to the Centre, they would regard themselves not as representatives of India but as the agents of their Provinces. That was the conception of the Centre held by Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, no academic doctrinaire but a practical statesman. He described it as an 'agency'—and Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan used the same word in submitting the same conception—'a body set up by the units to control and supervise the Central administrative machinery and to see that the work entrusted to it by the Provinces is carried on efficiently, amicably and justly'. Such a Centre, Sir Sikander declared, could not be 'a domineering Centre which may undermine their [the Moslems'] power and authority in the Moslem-majority Provinces'. And, as if to stress Provincial independence and to blunt the edge of separatist sentiment, he suggested that a group of Provinces might be entitled, after ten or fifteen or twenty-five years, to 'reconsider their position' in the light of experience and, if they chose, secede.<sup>1</sup>

This idea of an 'Agency Centre' is a constitutional novelty. It envisages a new kind of Federalism, so new, indeed, as to deserve a different name. It contemplates something between a normal Federation and a mere Confederacy or League. On the one hand, it does not attempt to fit the different entities concerned into the framework of a single nationhood, but only the less ambitious task of securing their combination for essential common purposes. On the other hand, the Centre it postulates is more than a consultative and co-operative Council: it is a Government, executive and legislative, with its own constitutional status, its own powers, its own administrative services. The proposal, in fact, is a true *via media*, and it seems conceivable that the Hindus, having already begun to move towards a settlement, might at least consider the possibility of setting foot on this middle path and that the Moslems for their part might at least be willing to weigh its merits against those of the path to Partition.

One point in the Moslem case remains—the desire to consolidate the Moslem-majority areas, the 'national homelands', into 'Moslem States'. This is not, as has been seen,<sup>2</sup> a new desire. It prompted Sir Muhammad Iqbal's appeal in 1930 for the recognition of the Moslems as 'a distinct political entity' and for the creation to that

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through the reduction in the number of its departments and personnel and in the size of its Legislature. Nor would a Regional Government be functionless. It might act as the guarantor of internal security. Its constituent Provinces might conceivably endow it with power to co-ordinate and control their police forces in the event of an outbreak of disorder so serious as to strain, as such outbreaks in the past have often strained, the resources of a single Province. Next in importance to security comes economic progress, and it seems probable that, if a Regional Government did come into being, the Provinces would give it charge of economic planning and industrial development for the Region as a whole—an arrangement which would considerably modify the disintegrating effect of transferring such powers from the Centre to the separate Provinces.

Whatever its prospective merits and drawbacks may be, Regionalism need not, of course, be applied as its authors applied it, to the whole of India. Symmetry is not a necessary feature of the Indian constitution. It would not matter if only the Moslem-majority Provinces wanted Regions and the Hindu-majority Provinces preferred to stay as they are: the operation of the Centre would be unaffected if some Provinces were represented there through Regions and others separately. Nor would it matter if the Indian States chose to be grouped as States for association with British India at the Centre, though, if Regions were in fact established, States which they encircled or adjoined would doubtless find it in their economic interest to be linked up with them. It seems probable, on the whole, that, if the experiment were tried at all, it would be tried, at least to begin with, only by the Moslem-majority Provinces. It was for their sake first and foremost that the notion of it was conceived. And it rests with the Moslems in the first instance to decide whether it shall be tried or not. With the possible exception of the Sikhs, the other communities would have no right or reason to contest the issue. If Regionalism were indeed a factor in a Hindu-Moslem settlement, it would be the only factor which would not require a prior Hindu-Moslem agreement.

It may be that the Moslems would be content if their claims were met as regards those three aspects of the Centre. If the Hindus could bring themselves to concede an Agency Centre with minimal powers and an evenly balanced system of representation, it may be that the Moslems would no longer be overmuch concerned with that other question of territorial consolidation. But if, as seems more likely at the moment, the idea of Moslem statchood

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in British India, so it has provided in the treaty-system a safeguard of the Princes' rights. And those rights, like Moslem rights, were directly threatened by the declared intention of Mr. Gandhi and his disciples to replace the British with a Congress Raj. The Princes were advised to come to terms with the Congress without delay, or, in other words, to concede the Congress claim that the political difference between British and Indian India should be ironed out forthwith and the government of the States converted at a stroke into full responsible government. And the lesson of 1942, the revelation of the lengths to which the Congress under Mr. Gandhi's leadership was prepared to go, was as plain to the Princes as to the Moslem League. They refuse, therefore, as firmly as the League, to acquiesce in the final withdrawal of British power until their future position has been guaranteed. Here is the second major obstacle to India's emancipation, the second element in the existing deadlock that needs to be resolved.

One possible solution would be the same as the League's—Partition; and the British proposals of 1942 did not rule out that possibility. They accorded to the States the same right of non-adherence to the new constitution as the Provinces, and for the same reason—to prevent the attainment of full freedom by the majority of the Indian people being permanently blocked by minority dissent. But nothing was said at that time as to the status which non-adhering States would occupy, except that a revision of their treaty arrangements would have to be negotiated. In fact two kinds of status seem possible.

(1) It would be difficult but not impracticable for a substantial group of States—not necessarily contiguous in these days of air-transport—to be so linked together as to form an independent Union of their own. Its strategic position and its economic prospects would compare not unfavourably with those of Pakistan. By such a drastic method, it might perhaps be argued, by cutting the States clear away from the democratic contagion of the Provinces, the Princes could make sure of preserving their prerogatives. Their attitude to the Crown makes it probable that they would wish the status of their Union to be that of a Dominion, but in any case the treaty-system would presumably lapse. An independent sovereign State, whether within or without the British Commonwealth, cannot submit to one-sided external intervention of any sort in its domestic affairs.

Most of the drawbacks to this form of Partition, and not least its economic disadvantages, are much the same as those discussed

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There are manifest disadvantages, then, in Partition in any form to the States themselves; and the injury it would inflict on India as a whole is no less plain. An India deprived of the States would have lost all coherence. They stand between all four quarters of the country. If no more than the Central Indian States and Hyderabad and Mysore were excluded from the Union, the United Provinces would be almost completely cut off from Bombay, and Bombay completely from Sind.<sup>2</sup> The strategic and economic implications are obvious. India could live if its Moslem limbs in the north-west and north-east were amputated, but could it live without its midriff?

Fortunately the Princes' attitude towards Partition has so far been very different from that of the Moslem League. Some of their ablest Ministers, as has been seen, have condemned it out of hand. Not a voice has been heard in the States in favour of it. It might prove easier, therefore, to adjust the relations between British and Indian India in one Union than to bridge the Hindu-Moslem gulf; and, if the statesmen of British India succeed with the latter task, they ought not to fail with the former. For the issue, it may be repeated, is not steeped in communal emotion: it is dominantly constitutional, a question of the form of government. And, deeply as Indian democrats may deplore that a liberated India should not be a wholly democratic India, surely they will recognise that the association of Provinces and States in one Union cannot be brought about by force and that it can only be brought about by consent if they concede the Princes' claim to settle the political development of their States with their own peoples without external interference. If patriotism demands from British Indian politicians at least that measure of acquiescence in the hard facts of the situation, does it not ask something of the Princes too? Ought they not, on their side, to proclaim their allegiance not only to the cause of Indian unity but also to the principles of liberalism? Rightly or wrongly, they believe that power cannot pass to their peoples yet

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, Part III, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> See maps on p. 37 above and at end.

only wrecked the hopes of Indian nationhood they had kept two-fifths of India under British rule. The sinister forecast which the Congress leaders made when they denounced the British offer of the right of non adherence to the States in 1942 would seem to have been justified in the event. The States would be regarded as 'enclaves where foreign authority still prevails' a perpetual menace to the freedom of the people of the States as well as the rest of India' <sup>1</sup>

There are manifest disadvantages, then, in Partition in any form to the States themselves, and the injury it would inflict on India as a whole is no less plain. An India deprived of the States would have lost all coherence. They stand between all four quarters of the country. If no more than the Central Indian States and Hyderabad and Mysore were excluded from the Union, the United Provinces would be almost completely cut off from Bombay, and Bombay completely from Sind <sup>2</sup>. The strategic and economic implications are obvious. India could live if its Moslem limbs in the north west and north east were amputated, but could it live without its mudriff?

Fortunately the Princes' attitude towards Partition has so far been very different from that of the Moslem League. Some of their ablest Ministers, as has been seen, have condemned it out of hand. Not a voice has been heard in the States in favour of it. It might prove easier, therefore, to adjust the relations between British and Indian India in one Union than to bridge the Hindu-Moslem gulf, and, if the statesmen of British India succeed with the latter task, they ought not to fail with the former. For the issue, it may be repeated, is not steeped in communal emotion: it is dominantly constitutional, a question of the form of government. And, deeply as Indian democrats may deplore that a liberated India should not be a wholly democratic India, surely they will recognise that the association of Provinces and States in one Union cannot be brought about by force and that it can only be brought about by consent if they concede the Princes' claim to settle the political development of their States with their own peoples without external interference. If patriotism demands from British Indian politicians at least that measure of acquiescence in the hard facts of the situation, does it not ask something of the Princes too? Ought they not on their side, to proclaim their allegiance not only to the cause of Indian unity but also to the principles of liberalism? Rightly or wrongly, they believe that power cannot pass to their peoples yet

<sup>1</sup> *Report* Part III, p. 149

<sup>2</sup> See maps on p. 37 above and at end

### III

## Britain and India: the Last Chapter

### I BRITISH OBLIGATIONS

THE preceding chapter was concerned with the kind of settlement required between Indians in order to set India free. But there must also be a settlement between the Indian leaders and the British Government. For the latter has undertaken certain responsibilities in India and is obliged to see to it that they are honourably discharged. That is why the fulfilment of 'British obligations' has always been made a condition of final abdication. They do not, as nationalist critics have sometimes asserted, raise insuperable obstacles which may serve as an excuse for never abdicating. On the contrary, the questions they involve can be settled much more easily than those involved in the internal Indian settlement.<sup>1</sup>

The first question is defence. Hitherto Britain has been primarily responsible for the security of India against external attack, but it is not now, as the war has shown, and it will not be in the future, a matter which concerns Britain and India only. The safety of India is a strategic necessity for all the United Nations. On one side lie the Middle East and the approaches to South Africa and the Suez Canal; on the other side China, Burma, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, and the approaches to Australia and the Pacific. The defence of India, therefore, will be a vital factor in the new system of collective security, but, pending the building up of her own military and mechanical strength, she will not be able to defend herself unaided. For the time being she will require the help of other naval, air, and land forces, correlated with her own forces in a joint system of defence. Such strategic combinations are necessitated by the conditions of modern warfare, and the leasing to the United States in 1941 of several defence bases on British soil in the West Atlantic are proof, if it be needed, that those combinations cannot be regarded as lowering a nation's status in the world or derogatory to its self-respect.

If free India chooses to remain within the British Commonwealth, she could rely on the assistance of all its sister-nations, but, if she makes the other choice, she could still count on obtaining such British help as she might need. For India dominates the

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed treatment of them, see *Report*, Part III, chap. XIII.

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system would have become an anachronism and would presumably be abrogated by mutual consent <sup>1</sup>

Similar arguments apply to the British pledges to the minority communities. They are concentrated, so to speak, in the British Government's undertaking not to accept, still less to impose, a constitutional settlement in which the communities do not acquiesce. As regards the largest of them, the Moslems, that undertaking was reflected, as in the case of the States, in the option of non-adherence offered to the Provinces in 1942. But, of course, the territorial distribution of the communities, including the Moslems, is not on a Provincial basis, and the other minorities, particularly the 48 millions of the Scheduled Castes, cannot fall back on Partition in the last resort. They must secure their rights in the new constitution, and, having secured them, they must depend for their maintenance on the sovereignty of law. An additional guarantee was suggested in the British proposals of 1942, which contemplated the conclusion of a treaty between the British Government and the Indian constitutional convention providing *inter alia* 'for the protection of racial and religious minorities'. But this proposal is open to serious objections. It does not accord with Dominion status: it is inconceivable that any Dominion would concede such a treaty right to Britain. If India opts for secession from the Commonwealth, the fate of the one-sided and ineffectual Minority Treaties in Europe would be scarcely an encouraging precedent. And how would such a treaty be expected to operate? How could the British Government satisfy itself that an alleged breach of it had in fact occurred? And, if satisfied, how could it afford the promised 'protection' except by direct intervention in the administration of India, backed in the last necessity by force? And how would this square with the military situation if there were also a defence treaty under which British and Indian forces were inter-linked on the frontier? Quite apart, moreover, from the practical difficulties it would involve, the effects of such intervention would surely be deplorable. It would bring British 'imperialism' back onto the stage of Indian politics. It would seem to justify the nationalist charge that Britain had never meant India to be really free. It would dissipate all hope of a friendlier relationship between free India and Britain. If she had chosen to stay in the Commonwealth, it would instantly drive her out. Nor would it serve the cause of the minorities. They would be regarded by the majorities

<sup>1</sup> For the possibility of retaining a personal relationship with the Crown for certain purposes, see *Report* Part III, p. 154.

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whose exploits in the common fight for freedom are known to all the world <sup>1</sup> -

The question of the financial obligation, which the British Government assumed when India incurred her public debt under its control and with its backing has been settled by the course of war finance. Nearly all the part of that debt known as the 'sterling debt' and mainly raised in Britain has already been 'repatriated', and, as was pointed out in an earlier chapter, the old financial relationship has been reversed by the British Government's huge expenditure for war purposes in India <sup>2</sup>. The part of the public debt known as the 'rupee debt' and mainly raised in India will remain an obligation of the new Government of India. If India is partitioned, there must be another such equitable division as was made when Burma was separated from India in 1937.

There remains an obligation which has been much discussed by British business men in India and in Britain. Ought not the British commercial community to continue to be regarded as a minority community entitled to the same safeguards as the Indian minorities? And ought not they to be protected against the possibility of unfair discrimination on the part of the new Indian Government? The answers to those questions have already been given by the British Government. In the course of a debate in the House of Lords in 1942, the Duke of Devonshire, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for India, pointed out that the question was governed by the offer to India of Dominion Status. Unlike the Indian minorities, the British business community in India could not obtain guarantees for their protection as a condition of an agreed constitution. No such guarantees were exacted when the former British Colonies became self governing Dominions: they can only be obtained as between equal partners, by free negotiation. British commercial interests in the Dominions declared the Duke, are by no means neglected by the British Government, but

<sup>1</sup> As to the I.C.S. and I.P. it was announced in June 1945 by the then Secretary of State (Mr. Amery) that it is an essential corollary of His Majesty's Government's declared policy of promoting full self government in India and Burma that from dates as yet uncertain in either case appointments held by tenure from the Secretary of State will cease. Candidates for entry into these Services have been warned that their appointments may thus be terminated at any time subject to due notice and the payment of specified compensatory grants. (*Civil Appointments in India and Burma* 1945). As regards the Army it seems probable that all permanent entries into the Indian Army will in future be Indian and that British officers will be provided as required by seconding for fixed periods.

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bastions of India's security to east and west, with Australia and New Zealand on the one side, with South Africa, Mauritius and Aden on the other. All those territories, with the sole exception of the Dutch East Indies, are associated in the Commonwealth; and all of them need India's co-operation for their safety as much as India needs theirs. For her economic welfare, likewise, India will want partners. The rapid execution of her plans for industrial development, in particular, will demand assistance from outside in the provision of capital plant, in the training of technicians and so forth. There is no question, it need hardly be said, of attempting to establish an exclusive regional monopoly—no more now than at any time in the past—but, if India should seek for some measure of co-operation within the Commonwealth, it would, of course, be readily forthcoming. It is common knowledge that Britain, for her part, will depend for maintaining her standard of living in the years ahead on the expansion of her export trade.

History might seem to prompt the choice to stay within the Commonwealth. India's long and close connexion with Britain has woven ties that cannot be broken in a day. For generations past Indians have worked with Englishmen, comrades and friends, in the army, in the civil services, in the courts, in the professional and scientific and commercial world; and for many years now every educated Indian has spoken English and acquired from English literature, more than from any other foreign literature, his ideas of human personality and freedom. But history cuts both ways. For, while there are still many Indians who are well-disposed towards Britain, the inevitable bitterness created by the nationalist movement and its periodical repression has coloured Indian patriotism with a steadily increasing antipathy to their overlords; and it has been intensified by a distrust, which has only recently begun to weaken, in the sincerity of British promises that India should be free. Maybe, when freedom comes at last, the mood will change; but many educated Indians may still feel impelled by pride in their own country and resentment at its long subjection to sever all connexion between the sometime-rulers and the sometime-ruled. Such a decision, however, would not be by any means unanimous. Those well-disposed Indians, remembering old personal associations, would regret it. Some of the minority communities, too, might opt for staying in the Commonwealth, not because it would afford them any prospect of external intervention in the domestic life of India—the impracticability of that has been stressed on an earlier page—but

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And, so far from being born and brought up within the Commonwealth, she has been linked with it, directly or indirectly, by compulsion. So were the French Canadians and the Dutch South Africans, but it is harder for Indians, after all that has passed, to make the choice that they have made. Yet, if they choose otherwise, the full potential value of the Commonwealth to its own members and to the world at large will not be realised. If India is one of its associates, the Commonwealth will be a far more impressive example of the possibilities of international and inter-racial relationship than if all of them are wholly or predominantly European. Bridging the gulfs between all the continents, affording its members a more constant and intimate contact than they can hope as yet to enjoy in the great company of the United Nations, it might do more, perhaps, than anything else to bring about that 'reconciliation of East and West' on which the survival of human civilisation may come in the end to depend.

And there is more than that in the British people's hope that India will not choose to break away. It is a matter of deep and genuine sentiment. The British connexion with India began more than 300 years ago. For 150 years it has been so close that British history and Indian history have been woven together. And much of the thread has been spun in British households in which service in India became a family tradition, and the Indian scene seemed never far away, and the names of Indian towns and districts were almost as familiar as those of Britain itself. For their sons were spending the best part of their lives in India, trying, most of them, to help the Indian people according to their lights and learning, many of them, to love India before they came back home. Some of them never came back. In the close-packed graveyards of India lies much British dust.

With such a record and such memories, it is hard for Britons to think that the soil of India can ever be foreign soil in quite the same sense as that of China, and may not Indians on their side feel that Britons are not strangers in quite the same sense as other folk? When at last free India faces Britain on an equal footing, is it too much to hope that, remembering the good and forgetting the ill that has come of the fate which brought them together, she will not want to turn her back and keep her distance? If that proves to be her choice, it will be a happy ending to the story which began when English seamen first set sail across the oceans and those quiet traders landed on the Indian coast.

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soon as they are set at large, in order to deter others from doing the same. This would be a great evil in any country, but is terrible in Oude, where no police is maintained for the protection of life and property. The cases of atrocious murders and robberies which come before me every day, and are acknowledged by the local authorities and neighbours of the sufferers to have taken place, are frightful. Such sufferings, for which no redress is to be found, would soon desolate any part of India less favoured by nature.<sup>1</sup>

## iii

To refer such sufferers to the authorities at Lucknow would be a still more cruel mockery. The present sovereign never hears a complaint or reads a petition or report of any kind. He is entirely taken up with the pursuit of his personal gratifications. . . . He lives exclusively in the society of fiddlers, eunuchs and women: he has done so since childhood and is likely to do so to the last. . . . He sees occasionally his prime minister, who takes care to persuade him that he does all that a King ought to do. . . . Anyone who presumes to approach him, even in his rides or drives, with a petition for justice is instantly clapped into prison or otherwise punished.<sup>2</sup>

## iv

I omitted to mention that, at Busora on the 27th, a Rajpoot landholder of the Sombunsie tribe came to my camp with a petition regarding a mortgage, and mentioned that he had a daughter, now two years of age; that when she was born he was out in his fields, and the females of the family put her into an earthen pot, buried her in the floor of the apartment, where the mother lay, and lit a fire over the grave; that he made all haste home as soon as he heard of the birth of a daughter, removed the fire and earth from the pot, and took out his child. She was still living, but two of her fingers which had not been sufficiently covered were a good deal burnt. He had all possible care taken of her, and she still lives; and both he and his wife are very fond of her.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., ii. 41-2.

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be lost in commencing the work. We should not be discouraged by difficulties; nor, because little progress may be made in our own time, abandon the enterprise as hopeless, and charge upon the obstinacy and bigotry of the natives the failure which has been occasioned solely by our own fickleness, in not pursuing steadily the only line of conduct on which any hope of success could be reasonably founded. . . .

We should look upon India, not as a temporary possession, but as one which is to be maintained permanently, until the natives shall in some future age have abandoned most of their superstitions and prejudices, and become sufficiently enlightened to frame a regular government for themselves, and to conduct and preserve it. Whenever such a time shall arrive, it will probably be best for both countries that the British control over India should be gradually withdrawn. That the desirable change contemplated may in some after age be effected in India, there is no cause to despair. Such a change was at one time in Britain itself—at least as hopeless as it is here. When we reflect how much the character of nations has always been influenced by that of governments, and that some, once the most cultivated, have sunk into barbarism, while others, formerly the rudest, have attained the highest point of civilisation, we shall see no reason to doubt that if we pursue steadily the proper measures, we shall in time so far improve the character of our Indian subjects as to enable them to govern and protect themselves.

iii. T. B. (later Lord) Macaulay. Commissioner of the Board of Control, 1832; Secretary, 1833. Law Member of Governor-General's Council, 1834–1838. Speaking in the House of Commons, 10 July 1833. (*Hansard*, xix (1833), 536.)

The destinies of our Indian empire are covered with thick darkness. It is difficult to form any conjecture as to the fate reserved for a state which resembles no other in history, and which forms by itself a separate class of political phenomena. The laws which regulate its growth and its decay are still unknown to us. It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own.

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iii. T. B. (later Lord) Macaulay. Commissioner of the Board of Control, 1832; Secretary, 1833. Law Member of Governor-General's Council, 1834–1838. Speaking in the House of Commons, 10 July 1833. (*Hansard*, xix (1833), 536.)

The destinies of our Indian empire are covered with thick darkness. It is difficult to form any conjecture as to the fate reserved for a state which resembles no other in history, and which forms by itself a separate class of political phenomena. The laws which regulate its growth and its decay are still unknown to us. It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own.

## THE CONGRESS AND THE MOSLEM LEAGUE IN 1937

The terms on which the leaders of the Moslem League in the United Provinces might be invited to join the Provincial Government were laid down as follows by Maulana A. K. Azad on behalf of the Congress.

The Moslem League group in the United Provinces Legislature shall cease to function as a separate group.

The existing members of the Moslem League Party in the United Provinces Assembly shall become part of the Congress Party, and will fully share with other members of the Party their privileges and obligations as members of the Congress Party. They will similarly be empowered to participate in the deliberations of the Party. They will likewise be subject to the control and discipline of the Congress Party in an equal measure with other members, and the decisions of the Congress Party as regards work in the legislature and general behaviour of its members shall be binding on them. All matters shall be decided by a majority vote of the Party; each individual member having one vote.

The policy laid down by the Congress Working Committee for their members in the legislatures along with the instructions issued by the competent Congress bodies pertaining to their work in such legislatures shall be faithfully carried out by all members of the Congress Party including these members.

The Moslem League Parliamentary Board in the United Provinces will be dissolved, and no candidates will thereafter be set up by the said Board at any by-election. All members of the Party shall actively support any candidate that may be nominated by the Congress to fill up a vacancy occurring hereafter.

All members of the Congress Party shall abide by the rules of the Congress Party and offer their full and genuine co-operation with a view to promoting the interests and prestige of the Congress.

In the event of the Congress Party deciding on resignation from the Ministry or from the legislature the members of the above-mentioned group will also be bound by that decision.

To the published statement of these terms Maulana Azad appended a short note.

It was hoped that, if these terms were agreed to and the Moslem League group of members joined the Congress Party as full members, that group would cease to exist as a separate group. In the formation of the Provincial Cabinet it was considered proper that they should have representatives.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pioneer*, 30 July 1937.

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9 His Majesty's Government have therefore considered whether there is something which they could suggest in this interim period, under the existing constitution, pending the formulation by Indians of their future constitutional arrangements, which would enable the main communities and parties to co-operate more closely together and with the British to the benefit of the people of India as a whole

10 It is not the intention of His Majesty's Government to introduce any change contrary to the wishes of the major Indian communities. But they are willing to make possible some step forward during the interim period if the leaders of the principal Indian parties are prepared to agree to their suggestions and to co-operate in the successful conclusion of the war against Japan as well as in the reconstruction in India which must follow the final victory

11 To this end they would be prepared to see an important change in the composition of the Viceroy's Executive. This is possible without making any change in the existing statute law except for one amendment to the Ninth Schedule to the Act of 1935. That Schedule contains a provision that not less than three members of the Executive must have had at least ten years' service under the Crown in India. If the proposals of His Majesty's Government meet with acceptance in India, that clause would have to be amended to dispense with that requirement

12 It is proposed that the Executive Council should be reconstituted and that the Viceroy should in future make his selection for nomination to the Crown for appointment to his Executive from amongst leaders of Indian political life at the Centre and in the Provinces, in proportions which would give a balanced representation of the main communities, including equal proportions of Moslems and Caste Hindus

13 In order to pursue this object, the Viceroy will call into conference a number of leading Indian politicians who are the heads of the most important parties or who have had recent experience as Prime Ministers of Provinces, together with a few others of special experience and authority. The Viceroy intends to put before this conference the proposal that the Executive Council should be reconstituted as above stated and to invite from the members of the conference a list of names. Out of these he would hope to be able to choose the future members whom he would recommend for appointment by His Majesty to the Viceroy's Council, although the responsibility for the recommendations

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22. His Majesty's Government consider, after the most careful study of the question, that the plan now suggested gives the utmost progress practicable within the present constitution. None of the changes suggested will in any way prejudice or prejudge the essential form of the future permanent constitution or constitutions for India.

23. His Majesty's Government feel certain that given goodwill and a genuine desire to co-operate on all sides, both British and Indian, these proposals can mark a genuine step forward in the collaboration of the British and Indian peoples towards Indian self-government and can assert the rightful position, and strengthen the influence, of India in the counsels of the nations.

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The task of making and implementing a new constitution for India is a complex and difficult one, which will require goodwill, co-operation, and patience on the part of all concerned. We must first hold elections so that the will of the Indian electorate may be known. It is not possible to undertake any major alteration of the franchise system. This would delay matters for at least two years. But we are doing our best to revise the existing electoral rolls efficiently.

After the elections I propose to hold discussions with representatives of those elected and of the Indian States to determine the form which the constitution-making body should take, its powers and procedure. The draft declaration of 1942 proposed a method of setting up a constitution-making body, but His Majesty's Government recognise that, in view of the great issues involved and the delicacy of the minority problems, consultation with the people's representatives is necessary before the form of the constitution-making body is finally determined.

The above procedure seems to His Majesty's Government and myself the best way open to us to give India the opportunity of deciding her destiny. We are well aware of the difficulties to be overcome, but are determined to overcome them. We can certainly assure you that the Government and all sections of the British people are anxious to help India, which has given us so much help in winning this war. I for my part will do my best, in the service of the people of India, to help them to arrive at their goal, and I firmly believe that it can be done. It is now for Indians to show that they have the wisdom, faith, and courage to determine in what way they can best reconcile their differences, and how their country can be governed by Indians for Indians.

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